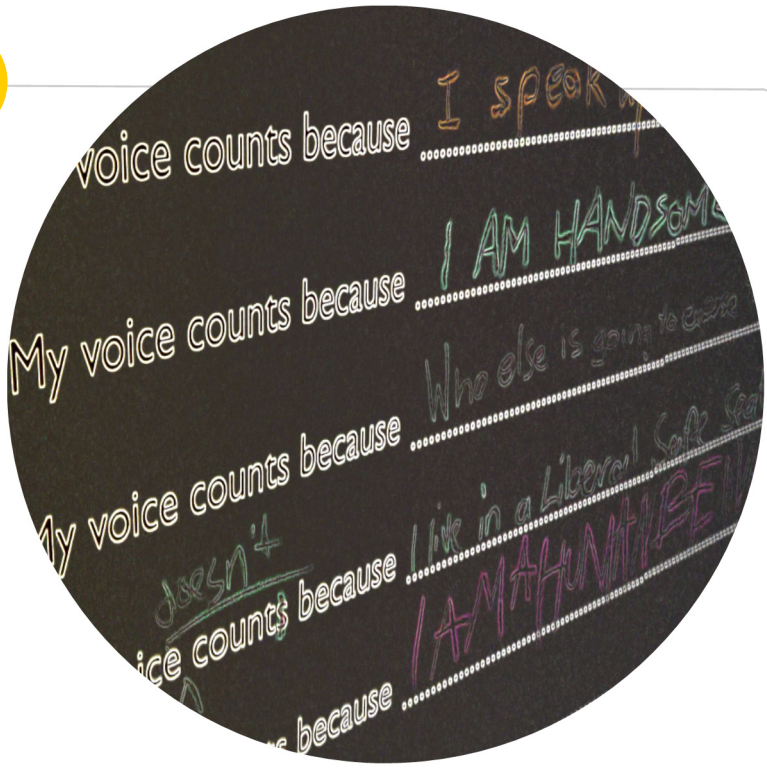

IMAGINED CONVERSATIONS

The powerful (and power-shifting) potential of museum participation

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The powerful (and power-shifting) potential of museum participation

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University

DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It has not been previously submitted, in part or whole, to any university of institution for any degree, diploma or other qualification.

The *International Journal of Heritage Studies* published an article in June 2017 which included results from this case study (Coghlan 2017).

In accordance with the Australian National University guidelines, this thesis does not exceed 100,000 words (exclusive of footnotes, tables, figures, maps, bibliographies and appendices).

Signed:_____

Date:_____

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ABSTRACT

For over a century, museums have claimed that they will democratise, need to democratise or have a new idea or approach about how they are going to democratise. However, a range of issues and institutional cultures that privilege expertise conspire to ensure professional practice remains undemocratic, exclusive and one-sided. This tends to result in the retention of curatorial control and a professional culture that resists change. Participation—in which visitors are invited to leave a comment, co-create or contribute to exhibitions—is the latest trend adopted by the museum sector that promises to democratise museums. In the context of ongoing debate about the new museology and social inclusion, how can museum participation redress the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and democratise museums (to become relevant, responsible, diverse and multi-vocal platforms for the wider social good) when many previous attempts have failed? The Museum of Australian Democracy's *Power of 1* exhibition was used as a case study to examine participatory experiences in an Australian context. Conceived as an overt attempt to activate visitor agency, the exhibition was shaped—visually, emotionally and intellectually—by the answers shared by visitors with little or no filtering from a curator or other museum professional. Informed by questioning of the relevance of museums to diverse communities, together with findings that Australian citizens had become disillusioned towards politics, the experimental participatory exhibition trialled tangible and digital activities to encourage visitors to discover the changing nature of Australian democracy and the power of their voice within it. Using largely qualitative techniques supported by an integrated mixed-method approach and interdisciplinary research, this case study was based on three new bodies of data that consisted of semi-structured interviews with museum professionals, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with visitors at the time of their visit and semi-structured longitudinal interviews with visitors several months later. After more than a century of museums talking among themselves about how to democratise, this case study invited visitors to reflect on and share their views about democracy and consider the utility of participation to make museums more democratic. The study found original, unexpected and uncomfortable results. Contemporary museum practice remained inherently undemocratic as was evidenced by practices of censorship, reliance on personal and untested opinions and active resistance to change. However, that data also revealed that when visitors to the *Power of 1* engaged in 'imagined conversations' with future and past visitors, decision-makers and power holders (dead or alive) and with communities to whom they may not otherwise have access, they exposed the powerful (and power-shifting) potential of museum participation. By accommodating multiple perspectives, being relevant to and inclusive of diverse audiences and respecting and activating visitor agency, participatory approaches showed the potential to transform museums into a platform to connect the voices, expertise and concerns of citizens to new communities, both real and imaginary, to make the museum more relevant, responsive and responsible. The *Power of 1* case study demonstrated how participation became a democratic, imagined conversation between society, individuals and the museum.

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CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Democratising the museum: The promise of museum participation

1.1 Context

Imagine this: a museum practitioner of 20 years wants to revitalise and improve her practice to find ways to make museums more inclusive, responsive, relevant and creative. She, like many of her museum colleagues of the time, was inspired by Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum* (2010), which encouraged museum practitioners to invite visitors to leave a comment, co-create or contribute to exhibitions as a way to activate visitor agency, share power and transform museums (Simon 2010, 351). The museum practitioner drew on the advice, insights and enthusiasm of Simon's influential book to conceive, develop and deliver an experimental and participatory exhibition, *Power of 1*, on display for a year at the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) in Canberra, Australia. Conceived as an overt attempt to activate visitor agency, the *Power of 1* exhibition was shaped—visually, emotionally and intellectually—by the answers shared by visitors, with little or no filtering from a curator or other museum professional. Together with findings that Australian citizens had become disillusioned towards politics, and informed by questioning of the relevance of museums to diverse communities, the experimental participatory exhibition trialled tangible and digital activities to encourage visitors to discover the changing nature of Australian democracy and the power of their voice within it. The exhibition development process and short timeframe was also experimental. It did not follow a defined schedule, was open-ended, adapted to and incorporated new ideas as they arose, collaborated with people and groups with little museum experience and sought to create something that did not look like or feel like a traditional museum exhibition. As well as trialling a new approach to the potentially dry but important topic of young people's engagement in their democracy, the participatory project sought to increase MoAD's visibility, effect and relevance.

As a museum about democracy, MoAD holds a particular interest and responsibility to be, or at least appear to be, democratic. Using an exhibition about democracy, the case study became an unprecedented opportunity to explore the democratisation of the museum sector in a museum about democracy. The participatory *Power of 1* exhibition and its development became one of the

first opportunities to examine participatory museum experiences in an Australian context. The museum practitioner—me—used the exhibition as a case study for independent PhD research. As a museum insider, I had knowledge of the sector's practices, policies and culture, and could gain access to the institution's machinery, including museum professionals, visitors, unpublished documents and visitor contributions. The museum and I hoped that this new research would help to understand the efficacy and effect of museum participatory experiences to examine if the rhetoric of participation was meeting its aims and to develop new understandings and test emerging thinking in the field.

From a museum professional's perspective, the original goals and intent of this research were sound and would generate new insights into the emerging trend of participation in museums, which promised to democratise the sector. However, in making the journey from practitioner to researcher and, more specifically, after exploring the history, theory and practice of participation in museums and other sectors (see Chapter 2), it became apparent that this research problem needed a wider scope for two reasons. The first was to respond to the range of power imbalances between museums and their visitors, and the second to acknowledge the multiple failed attempts to democratise the sector since the nineteenth century. Alongside associated debates around inclusion and community engagement, museums have claimed for over a century that they will democratise, need to democratise or have a new idea or approach about how they are going to democratise (Boas 1907; Dana 1917; Halpin 1997; Abt 2006; S. Macdonald 2006; Fleming 2014). What that move to 'democratise' may mean is often unclear, perhaps purposely so, but it certainly represents a rhetoric that allows museum professionals to be viewed as doing something towards becoming less elitist. However, throughout their history, museums and, specifically, museum professionals have been exclusive: they sought to retain control, resisted change and avoided sharing power with their visitors (Pierson-Jones 1992; Ross 2004; Spock 2009; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Black 2012; Fleming 2013; Kidd 2014).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Previous and failed attempts to democratise museums were founded on and assessed according to the values of museum institutional cultures that privilege expertise and remain one-sided and exclusive. In response to this context, my research question became more layered and complex: In the context of ongoing debate about the new museology and social inclusion, how can museum participation address the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and democratise museums (to become relevant, responsible, diverse and multi-vocal platforms for the wider social good) when many previous attempts have failed?

Two critical perspectives from both the visitor and the museum professional needed to be understood in the context of this expanded research question. As this research project sought to recognise the agency and active meaning-making of visitors, it was critical to develop an open and democratic research methodology that could examine how visitors, in their own words, perceive, understand and make meaning from participatory museum experiences (Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; S. Macdonald 2005; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012; Smith 2015). The research design also encouraged museum professionals to reflect on the development and delivery of the participatory exhibition to determine how museum practice extends, supports, challenges or hinders visitor participation.

1.3 Significance of the study

MoAD's *Power of 1* exhibition is one of the first opportunities to examine participatory experiences in an Australian context, develop new understandings and test emerging thinking in the field. The exhibition was informed by questioning of the relevance of museums to diverse communities and findings that Australian citizens had become disillusioned towards politics. It trialled tangible and digital activities to encourage visitors to discover the changing nature of and the power of their voice within Australian democracy. This case study has a certain circularity. It explored the democratisation of museums in a museum about democracy, using a participatory exhibition about participating in democracy, and in doing so, its findings are particularly revealing given the substantive focus of the institution.

This case study drew on three new bodies of data: semi-structured interviews with museum professionals, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with visitors at the time of their visit to the *Power of 1* exhibition and semi-structured longitudinal interviews with visitors several months after their visit to the exhibition. These datasets were supported by observation, analysis of internal unpublished documents and visitor usage statistics from MoAD, visitor contributions, reports and media coverage. The research design encouraged museum professionals to reflect on the development and delivery of the participatory exhibition to determine how museum culture facilitates or obstructs attempts to democratise the museum experience. The case study also sought to understand how visitors, in their own words, perceive, understand and make meaning from participatory experiences and drew on an increasing concern in museology to understand visitor agency (Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; S. Macdonald 2005; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012; Smith 2015, 2017). After more than a century of museums talking among themselves about how to democratise, this case study invited visitors to reflect on and share their views about democracy and the democratisation of museums. This study is a direct response to calls for greater theoretical grounding about museum visitors that is supported, accepted and implemented by qualitative, longitudinal and interdisciplinary research (S. Macdonald 2005; Sandell 2007; Anderson 2012; Smith

2015). Taken together, the context, methodology and results from this case study sought to bring theoretical grounding to participation and advance knowledge in the field of museum studies. This case study makes recommendations to improve museum practice and culture, revise museum policies and argues for a broader and more relevant role for museums within society.

1.4 Statement of thesis

As noted above, previous and failed attempts to democratise museums privileged expertise and remained one-sided and exclusive and were, therefore, undemocratic. A maximalist model of participation—borrowed from political science (Pateman 1976, 2012; Stoker 2006), ideas from Nina Simon's popular book, *The Participatory Museum*, and participation scholar Carpentier (2011b)—was used to invite visitors to shape an exhibition about democracy in a museum about democracy, with little or no filtering from a curator or other museum professional. The *Power of 1* case study invited museum visitors and professionals to reflect on and share their views about democracy, both in and outside of the museum, and to consider the utility of a participatory approach to make museums more democratic. Visitors uncovered the powerful (and power-shifting) potential of museum participation when they imagined MoAD as a platform to connect their voices, concerns and expertise to communities to whom they may not otherwise have access. Visitors to the *Power of 1* engaged in real or imagined conversations within the museum (with their family and friends as well as future and past visitors) and beyond its walls (with decision-makers and power holders, both living and dead). Visitors responded personally and immediately to the content of the exhibition (including other visitor contributions), which sparked conversations, shared jokes, generated memories, made meaning and activated visitor agency.

By connecting communities (both real and imaginary), accommodating multiple perspectives, being relevant to and inclusive of diverse audiences and respecting visitor agency, this experimental participatory exhibition showed the potential to amend more than a century of museums' undemocratic history. This is despite examples of contemporary professional practice continuing to use censorship and personal and untested opinions to resist change. Therefore, a more expansive conceptualisation of museum participation needs to be developed for the museum sector to realise the potential of participation. It must provide opportunities to participate or not participate, include multiple, unstructured and supported options to be involved and it must be uncensored, responsive and relevant to a diverse and inclusive audience. Participatory museums are much more than the latest marketing trend. These museums could play a socially responsible and relevant role as sites for community engagement and renewal: they could be a small piece in a bigger puzzle about democratic engagement.

1.5 Overview of the study

This thesis consists of nine chapters within three main parts. In Part A (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4), the context for the case study, review of the relevant literature, background to the *Power of 1* project and the research design and methodology are presented. In the literature review (see Chapter 2), the history, theory and practice of museum participation are explored in an effort to understand participation and the issue of how power is mediated, negotiated and situated in museums. Although calls for the democratisation of museums have been expressed since public museums were established in the nineteenth century (Boas 1907; Dana 1917; Halpin 1997; Abt 2006; S. Macdonald 2006; Fleming 2014), this rhetoric has masked, either consciously or unknowingly, exclusive and, therefore, undemocratic practices by museum practitioners. The new museology, which is still relevant in contemporary museum practice despite being nearly 30 years old, promised to champion a more balanced and democratic relationship between museums and their communities (Vergo 1989). The current phase of museum studies advocates that museums hold responsibilities in broader society to progress social inclusion, social activism, social justice and community engagement agendas (Sandell 1998, 2002a; Janes and Conaty 2005; Sandell, Dodd and Garland-Thomson 2013; Sandell and Nightingale 2013). Given that participation is relatively new to museum studies, other disciplines—especially political science—for which there is a longer research association with the idea of participation have been drawn from to contextualise the results and insights of participatory experiences in a museum context. Further examined are museum culture and practice and how they have responded to and potentially facilitated or obstructed democratisation attempts, particularly in relation to how museum professionals perceive, value and mediate power with their visitors. In spite of a long and articulate history of rhetoric to democratise the museum sector, there is a similar body of evidence that demonstrated how museum institutions and their practitioners have resisted change in their actions, policies and practices (Sandell 2002b; Ross 2004; Spock 2009; Fleming 2013). The core argument of this chapter is that a material commitment to democratisation of the museum sector is long overdue. New attempts to democratise, such as participation, need to identify interdisciplinary ways to recognise and respond to the institutional cultures and issues that privilege expertise and conspire to ensure professional practice remains undemocratic.

The background to the project (see Chapter 3) provides necessary context for the *Power of 1*: the museum, the project, the exhibition and the Australian political environment. As noted, the exhibition was influenced by the ideas from Nina's Simon's *The Participatory Museum* (2010). It became an opportunity to trial participatory museum ideas as part of an exhibition about participation in democracy and located in a museum about democracy. The exhibition was informed by ongoing questions about the relevance of museums to diverse communities and the findings that Australian citizens had become disillusioned towards politics (Evans, Stoker and Nasir

2013). In response to this disillusionment, the idea behind the *Power of 1* exhibition was 'you have a voice. It counts. (It always has.) Have your say and be heard', and it was developed with an aim for visitors to 'discover the changing nature of Australian democracy and the power of their voice within it' (MoAD 2014b, 1). The active encouragement from the museum director to experiment, take risks and consciously present the exhibition as a new kind of experience in a museum context was unusual but highly valued. With resistance and 'suspicion' (M5 museum director, 2015[1]) from some internal staff towards the project, external collaborators were engaged to deliver key aspects of the project. This included research and exhibition design, and unwittingly resulted in unlikely conditions to trial participation that echoed Carpentier's maximalist 'participatory fantasy' (Carpentier 2011a, 199). A preparedness to take risks, confidence in visitors and an aspiration to challenge fixed and controlling museum practices prompted a spirit of 'radical trust' (McLean 2007; Lynch and Alberti 2010), and all partners agreed that the exhibition should be entertaining, highly visual and consciously different from a typical museum experience (MoAD 2014b).

Once inside the original timber and glass doors of the exhibition gallery in heritage-listed Old Parliament House (home to MoAD), visitors encountered four highly visual generation rooms (Builder, Boomer, Gen X and Gen Y and Beyond). Each room included AV footage, an opportunity to participate and some props (no original collection items) to evoke the era of the generation it represented. Adjacent to these rooms was a stark white Tally Room that included a column installation of the results from a national survey of Australians' attitudes to democracy (Ipsos 2014), and a large-scale graffiti wall, secret ballot and message tree in response to the open-ended, self-directed and anonymous participatory activities. Tangible visitor contributions, such as handwritten notes, graffiti and ballot balls, were highly visible to visitors of the exhibition. Only the secret ballot required staff to install the visitor contributions. Digital visitor contributions were, for the most part, designed to be displayed on iPod kiosks. During most of the exhibition and the visitor and professionals interviews, Tony Abbott was the Prime Minister of Australia. He was highly unpopular at the time, as were many of his policies. This gave the mostly politically progressive visitors much to talk about, comment on and debate in the *Power of 1*, resulting in high visitor engagement and a large number of visitor comments.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology issues and design required to answer what became an expanded research interest following the literature review (see Chapter 2). In the context of developing debate about the new museology and social inclusion, the layered and more complex research question asked: How can museum participation address the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and help to democratise museums (to become relevant, responsible, diverse and multi-vocal platforms for the wider social good) when many previous attempts have

[1] M5 refers to the 5th museum professional interviewed for the case study. See Chapter 4 for more information.

failed? One example of the museum sector's undemocratic history is its approach to audience research. Assumptions by museum professionals about visitors are largely untested, and when they are researched they often rely on shallow quantitative approaches that invite visitors to determine, on a five- to seven-point scale, their level of agreement with statements about the museum. According to several scholars (S. Macdonald 1990; Sandell 2002a; Smith 2015, 2017), this bias was also manifested in the learning paradigm advocated by Falk and Dierking (Falk and Dierking 1992, 2000, 2016; Falk 2016). To answer the expanded research question, a methodology and design was developed that built on the substantial and qualitative research by Smith (2015, 2016b, 2017) to examine two critical perspectives from the visitor and the museum professional. The research sought to recognise the agency and active meaning-making of visitors to examine how visitors, in their own words, perceive, understand and make meaning from participatory museum experiences (see also Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; S. Macdonald 2005; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012). The research design also encouraged museum professionals to reflect on the development and delivery of the participatory exhibition to determine how museum practice extends, supports, challenges or hinders visitor participation. In summary, a qualitative, mixed-method, longitudinal, interdisciplinary research methodology and design were used, consisting of semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observation and document analysis. Techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of the data are outlined in Chapter 4, as is the required approval to conduct the research and its collection, analysis and interpretation.

In Part B (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), the results are presented from the three datasets used in the analysis of the case study. Chapter 5 examines interviews with 10 museum professionals (including the director, internal staff and external collaborators) associated with the development and delivery of the *Power of 1*. The museum professionals' interviews revealed that participatory techniques—such as open-ended collaboration, keeping options open, welcoming different voices and perspectives and iterative concepts and content development—can be discomforting when it is not possible to 'feel the edges' (M3). However, the interviews also highlighted that participatory techniques are significantly less confronting for external museum collaborators than for internal museum staff. This chapter evaluates the exhibition development process to reveal ways the project team, including me, were undemocratic in the way we approached the project. It identifies how the experience could have been improved by increased maintenance resources and support, and addressing internal staff members' resistance to the experimental project and their feelings of uncertainty and frustration. For instance, the speed of change made some staff uncomfortable, insufficient time was allowed to test the interactives for stability, and permanent internal staff who maintained the project post-opening was not made aware of and, thus, did not share in the open, democratic and experimental principles and culture guiding the project. Analysis of these interviews demonstrated some uncomfortable results about contemporary museum practice by internal staff.

This included censorship, resistance to change, controlling practices and other examples of why the sector remains, in many ways, inherently undemocratic and suggests why previous attempts to be more democratic within the sector have failed.

Chapter 6 presents the findings of interviews with 140 visitors as they left the *Power of 1* exhibition. Chapter 7 presents the findings from the follow-up (longitudinal) interviews with 11 visitors who had agreed to participate some months after their visit in a second interview by phone. Interviews with the visitors found original and unexpected results about the new museum trend of participation. These included many negative perceptions among visitors towards traditional museum experiences as passive, static, unable to cater for different ages and interests and lacking stimulation. Museum participation invited visitors to respond personally and immediately to the content of the exhibition (including other visitor contributions), which sparked conversations, shared jokes, generated memories, made meaning and activated visitor agency. Significantly, visitors engaged in conversations within their group of visitors and between visitors and museum staff. They also engaged in what may be described as 'imagined conversations' that took place with future and past visitors, with potential decision-makers and power holders (dead and alive) and with communities to whom they may not otherwise have access. Through these imagined conversations, visitors imagined a more ambitious future for museums—specifically, for MoAD—than do museum professionals, declaring that museums have the potential to be sites for democratic renewal and community engagement beyond the walls of their institutions.

Part C (Chapters 8 and 9) discusses the meaning of the results outlined in Part B and concludes the arguments made by the research into the *Power of 1* case study of an exhibition about democracy in a museum about democracy. These chapters argue that the case study points to multiple ways that museum participation can address the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and democratise museums to become more relevant, responsible, diverse and multi-vocal platforms. Chapter 8 argues how a participatory culture—the process, product and spirit of participation—can make museums, as agents for social change, more democratic, not only within institutional walls but within society. As noted, when visitors to the *Power of 1* engaged in 'imagined conversations', they uncovered the powerful (and power-shifting) potential of museum participation. The museum became a conduit to connect the voices, expertise and concerns of citizens to communities, both real and imaginary, to make the museum more relevant and in line with the goals of the current phase of museum studies and its interest in social inclusion and activism. Redolent of Anderson's (2006, 6) imagined communities but not necessarily limited by nationalism, these visitors would likely never meet, but would feel connected through the examples of the *Power of 1* exhibition, including shared views, frustrations, memories, identity and even jokes. This is a substantial finding for citizens who may be isolated from communities to whom they feel supported and connected. For example, one visitor, a self-described introverted Middle Eastern immigrant woman in a small

family who did not know many 'educated people, who are original Aussies', said, 'when I read these things I know they are true … and this is how I can get others' opinions' (P76/F6, follow-up interview 2015). Participatory exhibitions can also provoke and expand conversations, both real and imagined, which in turn helps to shape and recall memories of museum experiences. They provide an experience of participation, which, according to development studies and political science scholars (Cornwall 2004; Stoker 2006; Pateman 2012), helps citizens to play a more active role in making decisions that will affect their lives outside the museum. In this way, participation itself becomes a democratic, imagined conversation between society, individuals and the museum, demonstrating the potential value of participation to the museum sector and potentially more broadly in society.

However, as noted, the case study also produced uncomfortable results about how contemporary museum practice remains inherently and actively undemocratic by upholding centuries of practice that sustains elite control and constrains visitor behaviour. What emerges from the results of this study is that for the museum sector to realise the potential of participation, a more expansive conceptualisation of museum participation needs to be developed. In particular, it must include provisions for opportunities to participate or *not* participate. That is, visitors must be afforded the choice to engage or not engage in participatory exhibitions, and integral to this are multiple, unstructured and supported options for visitors to be involved. There is also a need to reconsider how and why professionals censor visitor contributions (that comply with the terms of use but are considered messy or off message) and, thus, attempt to control the public face of the meaning being curated.

Further, it would be useful to understand why professionals continue to underestimate visitors rather than be responsive and relevant to a diverse and inclusive audience. Chapter 8 demonstrates that museum participation is more than the latest marketing trend. It is an opportunity to reflect on the limiting aspects of museum practice and engage more transparently and creatively with visitors to help to redress the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations. As settings for imagined conversations, museums could remake themselves not only as democratic in principle and practice, but as sites that can help to build democratic renewal and community engagement. The conclusion (see Chapter 9) outlines the significance of this research and identifies areas for further study to better understand museum participation and the sector's undemocratic history. Appendices include interview schedules, questionnaires and the observation report.

1.6 Scope

Limits to the research are noted from the start. I filled, at different times, the roles of researcher, interviewer, curator and project manager of the *Power of 1* exhibition. My insider knowledge of the

practice, policies and culture of museums allowed me uncommon access to the machinery of museums. Most researchers cannot access the depth and breadth of information that I was able to access, nor understand a museum case study as comprehensively as I was able to understand the *Power of 1*. However, my close relationship with the content, institution and professionals could be perceived as both a strength and weakness: unprecedented insider access could potentially undermine researcher distance. Thus, to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the largely qualitative research, a number of respected techniques were applied, including triangulation of multiple sources and methods, prolonged engagement and peer debriefing (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba 2007, 18). Further, although single-site case studies allow for the close examination of one particular variable, such as participation, they are limited in their ability to make generalisations to broader contexts. Thus, the *Power of 1* case study enabled the assessment of whether or how participation mattered, rather than how much it mattered (George and Bennett 2005, 25). Finally, I am cognisant of the fact that the '*Power of 1*' is an overly simplistic message, based on liberal humanist assumptions that do not account for the many ways that power is mediated through, for instance, class, race and gender, either individually or collectively (Belsey 1985). The exhibition explored generational and historical changes to democratic participation as an entry point to engage visitors, and for consistency these themes remained the focus of this study.

1.7 Conclusion

This case study of a participatory exhibition about participating in democracy, located in a museum about democracy, expanded from a straightforward evaluation to a multilayered examination of how museum participation can start to redress power imbalances of traditional museum–visitor relations and, therefore, move towards developing more democratic museum practices. Despite the rhetoric of the new museology and the current third phase of museum studies that champions power sharing and inclusivity, museum culture privileges expertise and ensures professional practice remains undemocratic, exclusive and one-sided. As one of the first opportunities to examine museum participation in an Australian context, this case study illustrated how museum participation—by accommodating multiple perspectives, being relevant to and inclusive of diverse audiences and respecting and activating visitor agency—might connect the voices, expertise and concerns of citizens to new communities, both real and imagined, and provide social training to help citizens play a more active role in making decisions that will affect their lives. The *Power of 1* case study demonstrated how participation can make MoAD, and potentially other museums, a relevant, responsible, diverse and multi-vocal platform for the wider social good when participation itself becomes a democratic imagined conversation between society, individuals and the museum.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Don't believe the hype? How can participation democratise museums when many previous attempts have failed?

2.1 Introduction

For at least a century, museums have claimed that they will democratise, need to democratise or have a new idea or approach about how they are going to democratise (Boas 1907; Dana 1917; Halpin 1997; Abt 2006; S. Macdonald 2006; Fleming 2014). When used in a museum context, democratisation sometimes had oppressive definitions, including describing ways for museums to control citizens (Bennett 1995). More honourable intentions seek to make museums and museum resources accessible and relevant to diverse audiences and responsible to broader society (Smith and Waterton 2009; Anderson 2012; Sandell, Dodd and Garland-Thomson 2013; Sandell and Nightingale 2013). Indeed, the intended meaning of the move to 'democratise' is often unclear, perhaps purposely so. It certainly represents a rhetoric that allows museum professionals to be observed doing something towards becoming less elitist. However, despite this apparent commitment to democracy, a range of issues and institutional cultures that privilege expertise conspire to ensure professional practice remains undemocratic, exclusive and one-sided. This tends to result in the retention of curatorial control, a professional culture that resists change and the limiting of museums' appeal to privileged visitors unrepresentative of the broader community (Black 2005; Selwood 2006; Bounia et al. 2012). Public museums risk irrelevance and, therefore, further funding cuts if they continue to marginalise the majority of citizens who support museums through their taxes and fail to respect the active meaning-making and agency of visitors who enter their institutions. Participation—in which visitors are invited to leave a comment, co-create or contribute to exhibitions—is the latest trend adopted by the museum sector. It promises to democratise museums by accommodating multiple perspectives, being relevant to and inclusive of diverse audiences and respecting and activating visitor agency (Simon 2010). However, in the context of ongoing debate about the new museology and social inclusion, how can museum participation be expected to redress the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and democratise museums when many previous attempts have failed?

Democratisation of the museum sector is long overdue. Previous and failed attempts to democratise museums were founded on and assessed according to the values of museum institutional culture. This culture maintains a power imbalance between museums and their visitors, is reluctant to relinquish authority and control and finds it hard to accommodate conflicting views and change. Therefore, it is useful to examine how museum culture and practice has responded to and potentially facilitated or obstructed attempts to democratise, particularly in relation to how museum professionals perceive, value and mediate power with their visitors. Given that participation is relatively new to museum studies, it may be helpful to borrow from other fields, such as political science, that have a longer research association with the idea of participation to examine the history, theory and practice of museum participation and, specifically, the issue of how power is mediated, negotiated and situated in museums.

2.2 History never repeats: Where did participation come from?

Although museums have been traced back as far as 530 BC and 340 BC to the private curiosity cabinets for the affluent and respectable (Abt 2006), the moment when museums became accessible to the public is germane to understanding the foundations of museums' exclusivity and the subsequent attempts to be more democratic. The story of the public museum started in the mid-eighteenth century, when a few elite owners of private collections chose to share their collections to the public and, in doing so, expressed what would become familiar attitudes towards museum visitors. In a 1773 newspaper notice (cited in Halpin 1997, 52), private museum owner Sir Ashton Lever declared that he would no longer open his museum to the public because he was 'tired out with the insolence of the common People'. The desire to expand access to previously exclusive private collections emanated from a view of the museum as a platform to disseminate scholarship and knowledge to a public who should be educated (S. Macdonald 2002b). For example, in 1759, trustees for the British Museum (established after a donation to the British Government of a significant natural history and medical collection) debated how to define public admission and observed that 'tho' chiefly designed for the use of learned and studious men … yet being a national establishment … it may be judged reasonable, that the advantages accruing from it should be rendered as general as possible' (1759 British Museum statute, cited in Abt 2006, 126).

Expanding access beyond the 'learned and studious men' to a 'general' public became more crucial in the nineteenth century when public taxpayer funding established public museums with legislation and expectations requiring access for all citizens. This expanded access to citizens intended to democratise museums by using a pedagogical model of democracy to educate and unite the citizenry with rationality and reason (Chakrabarty 2002). Museum collections at this time were mostly organised in evolutionary, linear and hierarchical sequences by the singular and authoritative voice of the curator (Vergo 1989). The rhetoric of nineteenth-century museums was optimistic,

promoting nation building and democratic ideals. Adam (1939, 1) enthusiastically claimed that museums in the United States (US) were 'instruments of our democratic culture' and 'steel, stone, and marble tributes to some reverenced purpose of our democracy'. During this same period, Australia's first public museum, the Australian Museum (originally called the Colonial or Sydney Museum), was founded in New South Wales in 1827 (Docker 2014; Finney 2014). In the lead up to Australia's decision to become a nation in 1901, the five other British colonies—Tasmania (1846), Victoria (1854), South Australia (1856), Queensland (1862) and Western Australia (1891)—established their own public museums. In new nations where museums flourished, museums were an expression of a healthy democracy and were used to educate citizens in 'practical, political and cultural' knowledge as a 'method of social control, an essential framework for political democracy' (Adam 1939, 134).

Adam's (1939) use of the democracy paradigm to defend 'social control' demonstrated how calls to democratise museums had, at times, oppressive intentions. It is this paradox that Bennett (1995) exposed in his influential book, *Birth of the Museum*. The emergence of the first public museums in the nineteenth century, Bennett (1995) argued, had less to do with opening up collections to educate and entertain the people and more to do with new ways to control and 'civilise' the citizenry, especially working-class men. Dirty work clothes, swearing, drinking, gambling and other vices were perceived as unseemly behaviour that needed to be eradicated through exposure to middle-class standards of dress and deportment, and museums were used 'as instruments for the reform of public manners' (Bennett 1995, 90). To communicate the expected behaviour and to educate visitors in how to behave appropriately, a 1832 penny magazine (Rees Leahy 2012, 8) published the rules of the British Museum: 'touch nothing', 'do not talk loud' and 'be not obtrusive'. Many museum visitors adhere to these rules today. Although these rules are rarely on display in modern museums, they are covertly enforced by staff, security guards and even other visitors and have become part of the accepted 'museum literacy' of museum visits (Stapp 1992; Merriman 2016). The intention to attract working-class men to museums failed and public museums continued to attract privileged visitors. Indeed, today's museum visitors are still most likely to be highly educated, earn above-average incomes and work in professional roles (Black 2005). Back in the nineteenth century, national museums introduced strategies to encourage access to new audiences, such as free admission and extended opening hours, in recognition of their obligations and responsibilities arising from public funding (Sandell 1998, 408). In the US, museums were urged to engage more with their broader communities and were cautioned that if they ignored their communities they would become a 'passing fashion' (Dana 1917, 226). Attempts to diversify audiences and, therefore, democratise museum visitation continue to this day, with little if any change to overall museum visitation (Black 2005; Selwood 2006; Bounia et al. 2012). This will be further discussed below.

One of the challenges hindering the persistent pleas for democratisation is that these calls tend to have different and sometimes conflicting motives. As political scientist Held (2006, 1) noted, definitions of democracy can be ambiguous, even though it broadly means that 'the people rule' and there is equality. Levels of direct influence and participation by the people and systems of government vary between different models of democracy, from classical democracy to direct, deliberative and participatory democracy (Held 2006). Another political scientist Shapiro (2009) argues that democracy's goal is to minimise domination in order to shift power relations and improve the position of vulnerable members of society. Domination, explains Shapiro (2009, 3), results from 'a person's, or a group's, shaping agendas, constraining options, and influencing people's preferences'. Similarly, in museums, democratisation has ambiguous meanings. In addition to being democratic by attracting diverse audiences who represent all members of the community (not simply privileged members), museums have also been urged to be more democratic in how they present museum content and what (or who) was represented in museum collections. Over the past century, museums have tried to change how they engage with visitors. Some of these attempts have sought to be more democratic, such as bringing new voices and perspectives into exhibitions or trying new ways for visitors to interpret or engage with museum content. For example, one of the earliest examples of visitor participation was mentioned as a footnote to an article about the London Science Museum (Gammon and Mazda 2007). In 1937, visitors to an electric illumination exhibition could record their opinions about comfortable reading light levels. Visitors engaged with and took seriously their interactions with the museum and the citizen content complemented the museum's traditional and authoritative curatorial voice. This was a successful early participation experiment, and the museum reported that 'the co-operation of the public was marked by the care and intelligent interest which the majority displayed' (cited in Gammon and Mazda 2007). Despite the success of this participatory experiment, museum practice continued to be linear and hierarchical, dependent upon the singular authority of the curator and passive 'empty vessel' visitor and appealed to privileged audiences for a few more decades.

In terms of representation and access, the late 1960s to 1980s were significant for the democratisation of museum practice. Expanded and political roles for museums to contribute to cultural and economic development were envisaged, new ways for audiences to engage with museums were introduced and new museums were opened to provide a voice for different communities. For instance, children's museums and science centres forged a range of interpretative approaches, especially interactive and mechanical hands-on and audience-centred experiences. These included participatory activities in museum spaces, in which visitors left comments on bulletin boards called 'talkbacks' (Kamien 2007). Around this time, which coincided with the civil and women's rights movements and the recognition of the oppression of minorities, the absence of diverse voices and perspectives within museum displays and the potential for museums to play a

role in cultural and economic development for local communities was explored through the establishment of eco-museums or community museums (de Varine 1996; Davis 2008, 2011). The focus on community development influenced the development of the dialogic museum, which gave a voice to communities, exchanged meaningful dialogue and understanding and challenged a 'single authoritarian voice' (Tchen 1992, 290). Participatory and interactive art was also rediscovered in this period, and community-based cultural experts introduced participation into the museum studies debate (Carpentier 2011b). For example, experimental participatory experiences were successfully introduced into the Art Gallery of Ontario's 'Share Your Reaction' cards, which sought 'an honest and respectful partnership between museums and the public' (Worts 1995, 164). Worts (1995), one of a few practitioners who has researched participatory experiences, observed that museums were continuing to elevate 'expert' meanings from curators and were not valuing the personal meaning-making of visitors. He concluded that museums could 'become a much richer forum for the showcasing of living cultures' by encouraging active engagement from visitors across all their 'perceptual capabilities' (Worts 1995, 190). Nonetheless, the community-focused development of this period, which largely took place on the margins of museum practice, shaped the next phase of museum studies. Museum practitioners and theorists were urged to be reflexive and question the political nature of museums, ceding power from museum practitioners to visitors and other stakeholders.

This second phase of museum studies gained its name after the publication of Vergo's (1989) book, *The New Museology*. This was one of the most significant and overt attempts to democratise museums, as it acknowledged and sought to redress the imbalanced power relations between traditional museums and their visitors. As a reaction to an 'elitist' and 'old' museology that had focused on museum methods and collections, the 'new' museology promised to champion a more balanced and democratic relationship between museums and their communities. It recognised the cultural expertise of communities who were both represented in collections and sought after as audiences (Vergo 1989). Curatorial and other museum staff were called upon to respect the agency of their visitors (including their views, interpretation, experience and voices), a shift from the singular and authoritative curatorial voice that had prevailed since the establishment of public museums in the nineteenth century (Halpin 1997; S. Macdonald 2002b; Duncan 2005; Carpentier 2011a). Although visitor-focused and community-led experiences had been used in children's museums, science centres and community museums, the new museology sought to also effect change in traditional and mainstream museums. The ideas, aspirations and rhetoric of the new museology have become embedded in the corporate documents of many museums. It has resulted in hands-on and, sometimes literally, multi-vocal interpretive approaches, in which visitors can listen to diverse voices using handsets, multimedia or by watching videos. This is illustrated in several museums that have opened over the past two decades, including the National Museum of

Australia (2001), the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (1998) and MoAD at Old Parliament House, which opened in 2009 and is the focus for this case study (Message 2010). Despite museums and museum studies scholars embracing the new museology rhetoric, its presentation of non-dominant voices and its application in new museum development, museum practice remains—as many commentators continued to argue—undemocratic (Ross 2004; Assunção dos Santos 2010; Fouseki 2010; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Fleming 2014; Robinson 2017).

The new museology roughly coincided with the emergence of technological development and increased pressure for museums to attract higher visitor numbers (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). New multimedia interactives were heralded as an opportunity to not only empower the visitor but democratise knowledge itself (G. F. MacDonald 1992; Griffiths 2003). It was argued (G. F. MacDonald 1992) that the introduction of technology would democratise the museum experience because it would create flexible and personal visitor experiences, attract young visitors, invite active learning and interaction, provide multiple viewpoints and entertain (G. F. MacDonald 1992). It was further argued (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998) that technological development would increase museum visitation at a time when museums needed to justify their existence and the number of visitors through museum doors became paramount: in an environment of reduced government support, some museums sought to appeal to a wider and more sizeable audience to attract new funding sources. Once again, with change came resistance: museum practitioners opposed the introduction of technology because it threatened their authority and compromised what was viewed as the integrity of the experience (S. Macdonald 2002b). A debate ensued about the merit of education versus entertainment (Witcomb 2003). Needless to say, the promises of technology were not fully realised. Some technological interactives introduced into museums were 'more totalitarian than democratic', actively controlled visitors, their path and time spent at exhibits and impeded opportunities for visitors to make personal interpretations (Witcomb 2003, 135–37). However, these days, visitors would be hard-pressed to find a museum that does not include a technological aspect, such as a tour, app, touch screen or virtual-reality experience, to its visitor experience.

From the new museology emerged what has been usefully described as the 'third phase' of museum studies, incorporating current social inclusion, activism and community engagement agendas (Message and Witcomb 2015, xxxviii). Participation was also incorporated in this phase, and is discussed below. While the new museology interrogated the relationships between the museum, its audiences and directly affected communities, the current phase of museum studies evolved to examine the museum and its potential responsibility beyond institutional walls and broader society (Ross 2004; Carpentier 2011b, 2011a). According to Anderson (2012, 224), this resulted in a 'refocusing of our thinking away from what we want to offer, towards what is needed for individual and community well-being'. This reflexive work attempted to seriously engage with the effect museums have on their communities, their potential to play an activist role, attempts to incorporate

external perspectives into the museum and greater accountability of the use of public money to serve more than a privileged audience (Smith and Waterton 2009; Sandell, Dodd and Garland-Thomson 2013; Sandell and Nightingale 2013). Power sharing was critical in this third phase, according to Marstine (2006, 5), who argued that museums needed to transform 'from a site of worship and awe to one of critical enquiry … that is transparent in its decision-making, willing to share power, and activist in promoting human rights'.

The championing of social justice and cultural change emerged from a public policy and funding program of the United Kingdom (UK) government that sought to increase diversity among museum audiences. This program inspired the museum sector to adopt a new narrative and language of social inclusion, especially in mission statements and official documents from both the UK and Australia (Sandell 1998, 2007). In simple terms, the UK social inclusion policy required museums to develop programs that would help them to meet and report on visitor targets that reflected the cultural and social diversity of Britain or, at least, its surrounding districts. Funding followed compliance with these targets. Analysis by Tlili (2008) and Selwood (2006) of this UK policy, its research and its effect concluded that, much like previous attempts to democratise museums and its audiences, social inclusion struggled to meet the expectations of its own rhetoric. Tlili (2008, 137) argued that the imperative for museums to prepare detailed reports on visitor profiles and numbers to receive funding 'blurred the lines' between social inclusion and marketing because of a 'scramble' to improve visitation 'at any rate'. Selwood (2006) demonstrated that, despite the social inclusion rhetoric, the policy improved visitor numbers but merely through increased repeat visitation from existing middle-class museum audiences who were already well represented in the museum community. With an echo to the aspirations of nineteenth-century museums, Smith and Waterton (2009, 107) argued that the social inclusion agenda was less about breaking down barriers to access the excluded working-class or under-represented ethnic audiences, but more promoted 'acts of cultural or social assimilation' into 'white middle class and elite values that tend to underpin traditional museums and heritage displays'. The failures of the UK social inclusion policy illustrated how rhetoric was used by museum professionals and scholars to retain the status quo and resist democratisation by masking the sector's pervading culture of exclusion, elitism and control (Spock 2009; Black 2012; Fleming 2013).

Despite the failures of policy, the intent for museums to be more inclusive is sound, as is the belief that museums have the potential to assist in building an equitable society and a responsibility to be accountable to a diverse and representative audience when museums spend public funds. This built on ideas from the previous century and prompted a body of work in museum studies that promotes social justice. Many scholars work in this space, but Richard Sandell is one of the most influential, advocating for an activist museum practice and 'a belief in the social utility and responsibility of museums' (Sandell 2002b, xviii). Museums, through this lens, are agents for social change (Sandell

1998, 2002a; Janes and Conaty 2005). The third phase critically acknowledges the continued exclusion and marginalisation of many groups from participating in the museum experience, in which 'those prevented from participating fully in the economic, social and political systems of society are those most likely to remain excluded from museums and the wider cultural arena' (Sandell 1998, 409). Sandell and his collaborators (Sandell, Dodd and Garland-Thomson 2013; Sandell and Nightingale 2013) widely published an examination of successful, socially inclusive programs in the sector, to better understand the rights, responsibilities and obligations of museums and to champion a role for museums in social activism and justice. Given the similar, earlier claims for museums to meet their social responsibilities, it remains unclear as to whether the intent and work of the third phase will help to democratise the museum experience. Despite decades of attempts to be relevant to a diverse and broad audience and to update the museum experience in response to social developments or cultural trends, museums continue to be perceived and often experienced as elitist, exclusive, passive and disengaging. There remains a significant disjuncture between what museums say they do and what they actually do. The rules stipulated in 1832 continue to be upheld and followed in contemporary museums, as Worts (2007, 111) described:

> Why is it that so many people think of museums not as centers of creativity but as quiet, boring, elitist shrines full of dusty objects behind glass? And how do we account for the phenomenon known as the 'museum shuffle', in which visitors slowly cruise by hundreds of objects on display, rarely stopping for longer than a few seconds, speaking in whispers and keeping their hands to themselves?

Participation has been presented as a new tool to welcome multiple voices, develop communities, share authority with visitors and make museum experiences more active and relevant to diverse audiences. It was the widespread popularisation of the internet (and especially Web 2.0 and social media) that encouraged the expectation of citizens to contribute directly and personally to the creative process, which many argued (F. Cameron 2006; McLean and Pollock 2007; Simon 2010; Carpentier 2011b, 2011a; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011) led to the embrace and proliferation of participatory experiences in museums. Visitors could transform themselves 'From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers' (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000). Museums have always reacted to and borrowed from cultural trends to build relevance and influence (S. Macdonald 2002b) and participation is one of these contemporary trends. Evolving from the new museology and social inclusion agendas to develop communities and welcome new voices, Nina Simon's (2010) book, *The Participatory Museum*, became a 'how to' guide to direct the museum sector. Simon is perhaps the best known writer of museum participation, but she was not the first nor is she working alone. Museum practitioners working in children's museums, science centres or community museums used participatory approaches for decades before Simon's book was published (McLean 2003; Gammon and Mazda 2007; Kamien 2007; McLean and Pollock 2007). However, Simon's approach captured the imagination of the sector for a number of reasons. Simon

took a democratic and consultative approach that drew on the best of the then new digital environment to develop her book and thinking using online discussions and debates, most notably her popular blog Museum 2.0. Her open, positive and likeable approach to developing her book and experience as a museum practitioner and online participant led to the self-publication of an easy-to-follow guide that drew on case studies from the museum field. Simon was not confrontational about the need for change. Even when presenting potentially critical findings, Simon (2010, 323–25) illustrated her argument with simple step-by-step guides, such as her identification of five common reasons participatory projects fail to obtain institutional support that relate to a reluctance among museum professionals to share power and embrace change:

1. Some cultural professionals perceive participatory experiences as an unappealing fad.
2. Participatory projects are threatening to institutions because they involve a partial ceding of control.
3. Participatory projects fundamentally change the relationships between the institution and visitors.
4. Participatory projects introduce new visitor experiences that cannot be evaluated using traditional museum assessment techniques alone.
5. Participatory projects require the allocation of additional staff time and budget for operation than for development.

Although it is clear that Simon identified problems of power, control and change within museum institutions, she provided these concerns from an insider's perspective and in a non-threatening, accessible, pragmatic and largely uncritical way. For example, Simon (2010, 193) identified the institutional values needed for participatory projects to succeed, including 'a desire for the input and involvement of outside participants', 'trust in participants' abilities', and 'responsiveness to participants' actions and contributions'. Throughout her book, Simon (2010, 121) acknowledged that participation threatened the power relationships and roles that traditionally placed museum professionals in positions of control and authority, leading to fear and resistance:

> One of the primary fears museum professionals (and all professionals) have about entering new relationships with audiences is the fear of losing control. However, in most cultural institutions, the professional expertise of the staff … is not based on content control. It's based on expert creation and delivery of experiences … The problem arises when expertise creates a feeling of entitlement to control the entire visitor experience. Power is attractive. Being in control is pleasant. It lets you be the only expert with a voice. But if your expertise is real, then you don't need to rule content messages with an iron fist.

Simon acknowledged the tension between expertise and everyday knowledge, which, dating back to Plato and Aristotle, is considered one of the oldest tensions in politics (Held 2006). Democracy can be sceptical of expertise, seeking to flatten hierarchies of power and knowledge; however, in a museum context, a more democratic culture would not seek to reject expertise, but to value and respect multiple sources of expertise. This is just one of the many benefits of introducing a participatory culture to museums.

2.3 Benefits and beneficiaries of participation

Introducing a culture of participation into a museum environment has many benefits to museum practice. Since the new museology, most of these benefits are stated but unrealised goals of the sector, including audience focus, empowered visitors, diversity in voice and representation. One of the most compelling benefits argued in favour of bringing participation into a museum environment is the introduction to museum interpretation of new, diverse and previously unrepresented voices, resulting in the union of citizen and expert knowledge (F. Cameron 2006; McLean and Pollock 2007; Simon 2010; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011). As Fiona Cameron (2006, 32) argued, participation could 'redefine cultural institutions as dynamic performative spaces—landscapes of diverse and accessible forms of citizen and expert knowledges with opportunities for audiences to reclaim cultural territory and play out their political potential'. Participation also recognises and respects visitor agency. Kidd (2014) noted that through participation, visitors feel empowered, encouraged and supported to participate more, and McLean (2007) argued that participation validates visitors' views, experiences and roles. Indeed, the addition of visitor voices makes transparent and continuous the interpretation cycle of museum and visitor, and is a visible expression of the more complex understanding of power as changing, fragmented and two-way (Clifford 1997; Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; Hall 2010). Visitor voices and perspectives unearth the multifaceted meanings that are being made, adding diverse and personal insights to the objects on display or the stories being told, and through this, adding dimension to the experience that some argued (Gammon and Mazda 2007) could not be achieved through 'static' exhibition methods and traditional interactives. Participation can help museums to realise their goal of being a town square for conversations (Simon 2010), in which visitors are provided with a platform not only to speak to the museum but to speak to other visitors (Kamien 2007).[2] By extension, the opportunity to invite and include visitor responses to an exhibition can lead to better decision-making by institutions that have neither demonstrated a sound understanding of the needs of their visitors nor universally accepted the role of visitor research in informing their practice. This will be discussed below. Stein (2012, 220) argued that 'a more wholehearted embrace of participatory culture may be the tonic we need to really understand what the public values, and to delve into the ways in which museums can change their current practice'. This enthusiasm for the benefits of participation within museums is not misplaced. The improvement in the quality and effectiveness of decision-making that is achieved through participation was demonstrated in the development studies field to have helped to achieve lasting and improved outcomes that were supported and understood by communities (Hickey and Mohan 2004).

[2] This exchange also occurs in the context of comments left in visitor books (S. Macdonald 2005).

While the benefits of participation are manifold for the museum, there are more potent benefits for citizens and broader society. This argument speaks to some of the original goals of participation from the fields of political science and development studies. Pateman's (1976, 2012) full participation model argued that in addition to citizen participation taking the form of voting in elections, citizens should be part of decision-making processes in schools, work and other contexts to provide 'social training' to develop attitudes and skills needed to achieve maximum participation in society (Pateman 1976, 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2001; Cornwall 2004). The experience of participation in contexts such as museums is valued as a way for citizens to play an active role in making decisions that will affect their lives (Cornwall 2004; Stoker 2006).

Within museum studies, there is a recognition and expectation that participation will help to make museums more relevant to broader society through enhanced citizen engagement. The process of participation may be as important as the product because the very act of inviting visitors to participate in a museum institution may hold the greatest benefits. In line with the goals of the third phase of the museums studies, social justice agendas and Anderson's (2012) call for museums to support individual and community wellbeing, many museum studies scholars advocated in favour of participation because of its benefits to society. Carpentier (2011b, 24–5) argued that as long as visitors feel welcome, invited and empowered, they may become more active, engaged and connected citizens and contribute to a stronger democracy; thus, 'participation allows performance of democracy'. Simon (2010, 197) advocated that community dialogue and strengthened relationships are the true value of participation, including 'the social value of building community relationships and the educational value of providing skill-building experiences for participants'. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel (2011) explained that museum participation empowered visitors and built self-esteem and civic engagement. It is, they said, 'mutually beneficial, respectful and to a certain extent aiming for balanced power relations' and could educate visitors about how to participate in society (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011, 171).

These multilayered benefits of participation are particularly relevant to this case study, which examines a participatory exhibition about democratic participation in a museum about democracy. The case study explicitly deals with participation within the museum and speaks to participation in wider society. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the *Power of 1* exhibition developed from (and supported new research about) Australian's engagement with politics and how they use conventional and contemporary forms of political participation (Evans, Halupka and Stoker 2014; IGPA 2014). The research (Evans, Halupka and Stoker 2014, 10) found that Australian citizens liked their democracy and felt pride in their stable political history, but were fed up with untrustworthy and adversarial politicians and preferred a 'new politics' that used 'participation to shore up representative democracy and develop a more integrated, inclusive and responsive

democratic system'. This demonstrates Australian citizen's existing support for active participation in democracy and broader society. Within political science, it also reinforces calls in favour of increased citizen engagement, in which 'democracy must involve citizens in more than simply selecting leaders to govern them. It must be about the capacity of citizens to engage in and influence policy debate and outcomes. Democracy, rather than democratic governance, rests on the idea of those being affected by a decision having a right to a say in that decision' (Stoker 2006, 22). Stoker (2006) argued against populism, which he described as reactive, antagonistic and divisive, but invited greater trust for citizens to participate in politics, and recognised that citizens may need to receive support to develop the skills they need to participate.

Since public museums were established, the rhetoric of democratisation has masked the undemocratic practices of museum practitioners, either consciously or unknowingly. It is unclear if the current third phase of museum studies (including participation) and its advocacy for social inclusion, activism and justice will be any more successful. Understanding museum participation via the museum studies debate is insufficient. It is necessary to draw on other fields that have a longer research association with participation, especially political science, to contextualise the results and insights of participatory experiences in museums. A closer examination of how people in museum studies and other fields theorise about the role of participation will be explored below, as well as the continuing reluctance of museum professionals to share power, control and authority.

2.4 Power play: How do people theorise about participation?

Today, participation is a widely applied and popular term in many fields, from politics to development, media to museums and others, but many who theorise about its concept and application concede that a precise definition is complicated because participation means different things to different people (Pateman 1976, 2012; Carpentier 2015). Melucci's (1989, 174) double meaning of participation is useful—'both taking part, that is, acting so as to promote the interests and the needs of an actor as well as belonging to a system, identifying with the "general interests" of the community'—and illustrates how the process, product, values and context of participation combine to be critical to its success. Within political science, there are many models of democracy relating to a form of government in which the people rule (Held 2006), but participation does not form part of all democracy models. In the earliest Athenian democracy, only select citizens could participate (Held 2006, 14), and more recent participatory models of democracy sought to revitalise politics by making it easier for citizens to have their say and, therefore, influence policy and decisions that affect their lives (Stoker 2006).

Most scholars agree that the main issue central to participation is power and how it is mediated, negotiated and situated. Takahisa (2011) called it the elephant in the room: the continuing power

imbalance between museum professionals and visitors. In the context of decades of evidence (Pierson-Jones 1992; Ross 2004; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Kidd 2014) of museum professionals' reluctance to share power and inability to surrender control and embrace change, it is apparent that museum participation studies would benefit from understanding the issues of power and control. Participation and power are concepts central to the study of politics and democracy, and an interdisciplinary approach that draws on 'disciplinary borrowings' (Wedeen 2010) from political science, which is rich with theoretical contributions, is integral to understanding the politics of participation in museums. Such an approach is especially relevant to the *Power of 1*, which sought to encourage citizens to participate in an exhibition about democratic participation within a museum about democracy (MoAD 2014b).[3] Development studies and cross-disciplinary research also provide valuable insights across a range of platforms and fields (Cornwall 2004; Hickey and Mohan 2004; Livingstone 2013; Kidd 2014; Carpentier 2015).

The degree to which institutions from any field relinquish power led to a predominantly hierarchical understanding of participation that uses the language of levels, ladders and stages to distinguish between pseudo (also referred to as token or manipulative) and authentic participation (Verba 1961; Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1976, 2012). Arnstein's (1969, 216) ladder of citizen engagement plainly stated that citizen participation is citizen power, and the eight-rung ladder progresses according to how much power is exercised by the citizen in the final decision. The ladder starts at manipulation (signifying non-participation) on the lowest rung, passing through consultation (noted as tokenism) towards the middle rung to the highest rung, named citizen control (and the greatest degree of citizen power and decision-making). Arnstein (1969) acknowledged the model had limitations, including oversimplification, but it was an important and often cited illustration of power and powerlessness in participation both within her field of citizen engagement and others. The distinction between partial and full participation was made by Pateman (1976, 71), who advocated for a model of full participation in which 'each member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions'. Much less critical but still useful models of participation come from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and the OECD. IAP2 (2014) suggested that all five levels of public participation (from Inform, through Involve and Empower) on their spectrum were legitimate and desirable options for communicating the degree of influence of the public's role and decision-making capacity in community engagement programs. What is most useful about this model is that, at each level, there is a clearly defined 'promise to the public' that brings transparency and accountability to the participation process (IAP2 2014). The OECD (2001, 23) offered three participation options for government consideration to strengthen relations with its citizens (i.e., information, consultation and active

[3] I note other scholars have also incorporated ideas from democratic theory and participation into the analysis of museum and cultural studies participation (Skartveit and Goodnow 2010; Carpentier 2011b).

participation); however, the OECD model does not seek to share power with citizens because the responsibility to make final decisions lies with governments. As public museums are typically funded and managed by government, this could account for the OECD model's close alignment in attitudes towards participation in museums.

In the field of museums studies, Simon (2010) presented four models of museum participation that, she claimed, were not hierarchical. Museums can flexibly move within and between the museum participation models, which reflect the depth of visitor engagement, the role of museum professionals, the point at which visitors become involved in projects (especially exhibitions) and levels of control and ownership. Contributory projects enable the museum to retain control, serve large visitor numbers and access visitor-generated content. Collaborative projects invite communities to contribute to content, analysis and design once the museum has established a framework and rules according to available resources. Co-creative projects aim to attract new audiences and reduce museum control to help participants to shape both the content and delivery of the project. Hosted projects invite communities to use the facilities and resources of the museum for their own projects and goals (Simon 2010, 189). However, with a broader and interdisciplinary view of participation and an awareness of the critical influence of power on the mediation of participation, it is clear that Simon's models are hierarchical according to the degree of control ceded by the museum and their willingness to share power. Simon is not advocating for full participation. All models retain a level of control and require that rules are followed. Even hosted and co-creative projects are achieved only through terms set by the museum, including defining some rules and determining resources. This explains, in part, why Simon's model has been so well received by museums. While introducing a new and popular visitor-centred approach that is in line with cultural trends, Simon's model has not threatened the power relations of the status quo.

Simon is not alone in avoiding issues of power in her model of participation. Museum studies scholar Goodnow (2010) advocated a layered approach of access, reflection, provision and structural involvement, but failed to address the power structures of the museum and resolved that curators and managers would retain the final word. Some institutional control may be necessary for legal, financial or political reasons—such as the removal of racist, sexist, homophobic, threatening or defamatory content—and there are examples from the online community to illustrate how such responsible regulation can be carefully and openly managed without resulting in censorship (Fichter 2006). Any curatorial intervention should be undertaken openly, honestly and with accountability to ensure that museum professionals do not pursue and maintain their own curatorial agendas by hiding behind the appearance of institutional responsibilities. As demonstrated in political science and development studies of participation, such approaches are at risk of becoming pseudo-participation. Institutions use the appearance of participation to seek control of citizens or to validate an already determined decision. Such a cynical and controlling approach reinforces elitism

and discourages citizens from future participation (Verba 1961; Cornwall 2004; Marsh 2008; Vromen and Collin 2010) and will discussed further below.

In contrast to Simon and Goodnow, Carpentier (2011b) explored a maximalist dimension of participation theory to examine media participation and cultural production that was analogous to Pateman's full participation. When visitors spoke in their own voices and 'influence[d] these symbolic environments' (Carpentier 2011b, 19–20), his maximalist model sought to challenge existing museum–visitor power relations and improve museum practice. In line with the third phase advocates for social inclusion and activism in museum studies, Carpentier (2011a, 199–200) envisaged that maximalist participation could increase museums' relevance and create a role for museums to serve a greater goal for society by generating democratic renewal. In his highly theoretical examination of participation, Carpentier's (2011a) model conceded that a complete power balance in social relations would never exist because disparities in power remain between individuals, institutions and society. Participation, Kidd (2014, 10) agreed, 'undoubtedly has issues of power at its nexus'. This chapter has previously advocated power sharing and opposed attempts to control; however, up to this point, it has presented a simplified understanding of power. Although some of the discussion of power, in a museum context, has portrayed a binary or linear relationship between the powerful/powerless museum/visitor, a more useful and contemporary understanding of power, and one that is contextualised towards the visitor-focused intent of this research, is that it is fragmented and changing (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998). Power is hidden in plain sight—it can be seen—and it produces resistance (Foucault 1990, 1991, 1995), it knows visitors are not passive receivers but actively construct their own meanings (Hall 2010) and there is a two-way, 'push and pull' relationship between museums and audiences (Clifford 1997, 192).

Audiences have the agency to subvert. Visitors, on their terms, choose—or choose not—to resist, interpret, attend and participate, despite what a museum had otherwise planned. For instance, based on the consistently privileged (e.g., educated and professional) profile of typical museum visitors over the past century, it is possible that the working class, whose behaviour and dress were the focus of reform by nineteenth-century public museums, had chosen and continue to choose not to attend museums (Black 2005; Selwood 2006; Bounia et al. 2012). Many visitors often choose not to read the exhibition labels provided by curators, preferring to visit the museum on their terms (Falk and Dierking 1992). Twelve years of interviews at Smithsonian institutions showed that visitors arrived at a museum with a 'schema' or intended purpose for their visit and then chose to fulfil those scripts despite the curatorial vision or content of an exhibition (Pekarik and Schreiber 2012, 494). This is the basis for the *Power of 1* case study, which was approached from the perspective of the visitor—their voices, meaning and choices—to challenge 'self-evident discourses' (Foucault 1991, 76) within the museum sector and the 'false consciousness it takes for granted' (Pitkin 1972, 179).

2.5 Risky business: Curb your enthusiasm

Participation and power sharing are not without risks, despite the enthusiasm for participation and its many benefits for visitors, the museum sector and broader society. Indeed, participation advocates Carpentier and Dahlgren (2011, 8) argued that there is 'a need for a more cool-headed approach towards participation that does not lose itself in celebratory frenzies'. For example, in the field of political science, a study by Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007) of government participation programs showed that some programs did not intend to encourage participatory democracy for young people but rather sought to control them or to reinforce a decision that had already been determined by the institution. Another study about young people and political participation (Vromen and Collin 2010) found 'static' and 'inflexible' mainstream organisations reinforced powerlessness, cynicism and elitism because they were unable, or unwilling, to act on the outcomes of the participation initiatives. As the OECD (2001, 21) noted, organisations 'may seek to inform, consult and encourage active participation by citizens in order to enhance the quality, credibility and legitimacy of their policy decisions, only to produce the opposite effect if citizens discover that their efforts to be informed, provide feedback and actively participate are ignored or have no impact at all on the decisions reached'. For this reason, Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker's (2006) study of participation in political science promoted the CLEAR framework to encourage effective and sustainable participation. Among other factors, the CLEAR framework (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2006, 298) noted that people were more likely to participate when they believed or experienced that their contribution was going to be listened to, 'responded to' or made a difference.

Similar risks are experienced within the museum sector. Pseudo-participation is easily spotted by museum visitors who refuse to contribute when they are being 'set-up' by a banal or self-serving question, such as, 'What can you do to help the environment?' (Kamien 2007). Such a shallow approach reinforces among most members of the community a museum's irrelevance and engenders cynicism towards democratic participation. Simon (2010, 183) noted that museums need to be 'responsive' to participation, but Lowndes and colleagues' (2006, 298) requirement to 'respond to' participants, even if applied to a museum context in which visitor views are off message or contradict a museum's authority, was seldom addressed in the museum participation literature. The greatest risk facing the museum sector is if participation is manipulatively incorporated into museum practice. If participation is merely a token nod to current trends, an opportunity will be lost to rethink the role of museums, share power with visitors and relinquish the culture of control that, for over a century, has hindered museums from realising the reforms the sector has been advocating (Carpentier 2011b; Kidd 2014). This further demonstrates the value of an interdisciplinary approach to improve museum practice.

In addition to the risk of trust, there are other operational and cultural risks facing museums that embrace participation. Operationally, participation is more resource intensive and more complicated to implement than a static museum display (Tchen 1992; Simon 2010; Carpentier and Dahlgren 2011; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011). Most visitor responses to participation are immediately displayed to the public in a model in which there is limited censorship or moderation of contributions. This means that the passage of time, which is typically used to process, synthesise, reflect and even wait until emotions settle on contentious issues, is unavailable to museum professionals who have shown a preference for a 'distanced', 'neutral' and 'objective' view of their subject matter (Sandell 2002b; F. Cameron 2006). Many visitors choose not to participate, exercising their democratic right to abstain and, thus, potentially leaving empty displays of visitor contributions (Cornwall 2004; Carpentier 2011b). Some visitor participation can be dull, off message, messy and contain errors. This is not unique to museum environments, and, as argued by Kidd (2011, 105), is often witnessed in social media as 'the distraction of the mundane and banal is a much greater threat to democratic action, conversation and community than anything else'. However, McLean (2007) and Simon (2010, 225) argued the opposite by stating that 'even inconsequential visitor comments are important to include when your goal is visitor empowerment'.

The risk that makes museum professionals and some scholars most uncomfortable is the challenge to and potential loss of authority when power is shared with visitors who are entrusted to be authorities, in situations in which their views are valued, considered and heard (S. Macdonald 2005; McLean 2007). Many scholars and professionals write in favour of introducing participatory experiences; however, their willingness to relinquish control and share authority with visitors should be carefully examined to determine the sincerity of this commitment. Witcomb's (2003, 130) 'dialogic interactivity', which moved the museum away from a didactic, hierarchical exhibition model to one that is open-ended and with multiple meanings, ultimately retained curatorial authority for the museum and underestimated visitors' own meaning-making. Witcomb (2006, 359) maintained the status quo when she cautioned that the loss of authoritative claims by a curator 'can result in an emptying out of meaning and a consequent loss of understanding of community based on commonality of experience'.

In the context of this discussion about power relations in museum participation, it is important to note that most of the observed risks relating to trust, reputation, operations, authority and culture are also used to argue against the introduction of participatory experiences into museums. For instance, the subjective nature of determining if a visitor contribution is trivial or relevant is a strategy used to censor visitor contributions, diminish their value and retain authority and control among museum professionals who do not trust their visitors (Simon 2010, 223). The risks listed above are real; however, most of them could be mitigated if there is a genuine desire to activate visitor agency and shift the museum paradigm towards a more democratic and inclusive model. If

this desire is not genuine, Sandell (2002b, 21) cautioned that 'many museums, in their desire for autonomy, resistance to change, and disengagement from societal concerns run the risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant and anachronistic in their values'.

2.6 Practice what you preach: How do these power relationships play out in museums?

The museum sector's visitor-focused rhetoric suggests a respectful, open and informed understanding of and commitment to visitor engagement and satisfaction. However, as noted above, there are many examples of how institutional cultures that privilege expertise conspire to ensure professional practice remains undemocratic, exclusive and one-sided. This tends to result in the retention of curatorial control and a professional culture that resists change. Therefore, it is important to explore how museum culture and practice has responded to and potentially facilitated or obstructed attempts to democratise, particularly in relation to how museum professionals perceive, value and mediate power with their visitors. In this way, it will be possible to examine how discourse plays out in practice, or, as Duncan (2005, 4) so powerfully stated, 'what happens in the space between what museums say they do and what they do without saying'.

Numerous museum studies demonstrate how museum rhetoric does not match practice. For example, museum professionals' dismissive attitudes towards visitors undermine the public declarations about being committed to audiences that can be found in many mission statements and corporate documents. It also contradicts the popular rhetoric of being visitor-focused, inclusive or meeting social obligations. For example, Sharon Macdonald (2002b) revealed the internal negotiations and values among staff when the London Science Museum, which was undergoing a period of cultural change and moving from a collections-based to visitor-focused organisation, was developing a new exhibition. Her ethnographic observations (S. Macdonald 2002b, 160) recorded 'fairly common' characterisations of visitors, including being described as 'problems', 'in the way', 'disruptive', 'stupid', 'deviant', 'vandals', 'sheep-like' and 'ignorant', especially if visitors did not understand the information or themes produced by curators. Anderson (2012, 224) concluded that many museums were poor corporate citizens that remained indifferent to their social responsibilities and obligations, and continued to appeal to and represent a narrow group of citizens but demanded public funding and resources. Sandell (2003, 15; 2007, 4) suspected 'a not always publicly voiced' resistance among museum professionals to deliver a visitor-focused culture in the sector and argued that there is not enough research to either inform or back up the lofty claims being made by museums. Lynch and Alberti (2010) argued that museum professionals preferred to discuss and present success stories and had little if any interest in candid, critical but constructive examples of where museum practice is failing and how it needs to improve.

Within case studies of museum participation, there are further examples of the disjuncture between museum rhetoric and practice. Instead of open approaches to community engagement, power sharing and authority, and instead of inviting new, diverse and potentially conflicting voices into the museum, there are examples of censorship, control and resistance. McLean (2007, 12) recalled a museum colleagues' argument against inviting visitor participation that both demeaned the visitor and elevated the museum professional's role, stating, 'I've even heard colleagues comparing themselves to medical doctors and equating visitor-contributed content to "gardeners operating on one's children"'. During a different participatory project, McLean (2007) observed Exploratorium staff editing visitor comments about significant moments in history that were designed to build 'social memory', and once the comment wall was filled, staff removed 'irrelevant' visitor comments (e.g., about love, birthdays, anniversaries and scribbling), revealing censorship attempts by museum staff to rigidly define themes and topics that closed off visitor perspectives and maintained control of the visitor experience. McLean (2007, 11) argued that the staff who removed these contributions failed to recognise that 'individually, each [visitor comment] was a single data point; collectively, they articulated beautifully the powerful human urge to claim a conscious and acknowledged place in this world'. A participatory case study (Jensen and Grøn 2015) of the Trapholt Museum sought to engage immigrant communities with a collection of modern Danish art; however, despite sound intentions, the case study was an illustration of participation on the museum's terms, which elevated and retained the traditional authoritative curatorial role and ultimately held visitors at a distance. Curatorial and institutional assumptions defined success measures and determined what the visitors wanted and, therefore, produced what Sharon Macdonald (2002b, 187) described in relation to a different case study as a 'self-perpetuating feedback loop'. This case study illustrates how previous and failed attempts to democratise museums were founded on and assessed according to the values of museum institutional cultures that privilege expertise and remain one-sided, exclusive and, therefore, undemocratic.

In political science, Stoker (2006) argued that it is essential in democratic decision-making that the interests of citizens are known. Unfortunately, in museum studies, the articulated commitment to audiences in museum corporate documentation does not always translate to practice and the sector's dismissive attitude to visitors is manifested in either not conducting visitor research or dismissing visitor research results when it is undertaken. Museum and heritage studies scholars agree that understanding and acting on visitor needs is a priority for the museum sector (S. Macdonald 2005; Sandell 2007; Smith 2015). Many museums today have legislative requirements or corporate documents that commit to access for all people and emphasise the organisation's commitment to focusing on their visitors, encouraging participation and meeting social responsibilities for their communities (Sandell 2007; Message 2014; Merriman 2016). Although early visitor studies in museums have been traced to the 1920s, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that

visitor studies started to establish itself as a field (Bitgood and Shettel 1996; McLean and Pollock 2007). However, despite the field's establishment and the pressure for museums to report on their influence and visitation, many professionals do not rely on visitor studies or audience research to inform and improve their practice. As Simon (2010, 318) politely noted, museum professionals and scholars 'are still working out how visitor studies can be most useful to actually impact how institutions function'. Sharon Macdonald's (2002b, 169) ethnographic study observed that visitor research was typically undertaken 'to be seen to have been done', but if research was available it arrived too late to inform changes to the exhibition. Bitgood and Shettel (1996, 8) acknowledged that 'concerns over institutional acceptance are well placed. The most competent visitor study is useless if the institution does not accept and use it'. Further, there are a number of examples of professionals devaluing and dismissing visitor research or not even undertaking it (Bitgood and Shettel 1996; S. Macdonald 2002, 2005; Sandell 2007; Smith and Campbell 2015), such as museum professionals not trusting their visitors (Pryor 2007), calling them 'stupid' or 'deviants' when the curatorial message was unclear or exhibits were not used as predicted (Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2000; S. Macdonald 2006; Smith 2006) and unconventional approaches to activate visitor agency were rejected by museum professionals as 'dumbing down' (Fleming 2014). If museums are seldom using visitor research to understand and improve their practice or to understand the interests of the broader non-visiting population, it is expected that the typical audience profile (i.e., privileged, educated visitor) of public museums since their establishment will remain unchanged despite the democratising rhetoric about inclusivity and access (Bennett 1995; Sandell 1998; S. Macdonald 2002b; Selwood 2006).

Without adequate research and understanding of visitors, there is a 'disjunction' between curators' assumptions and the actual audience response (Lavine 1992, 139). Within much commentary and scholarship, there is an overwhelming sense that museum practitioners incorrectly perceive their visitors as passive receivers (Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1992; Tchen 1992; Sandell 1998; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2000; Sandell 2007; Carpentier 2011a; Smith 2015). Indeed, one of the major issues in audience research is that museum professionals and academics assume that they know what visitors do and take away from museum visits. Generally, these assumptions have either not been—or have been incompletely—tested. When visitors are researched (usually at the time of the visit), professionals have typically relied on shallow quantitative approaches that invite visitors to determine on a five- or seven-point scale how much they agree or disagree with the researcher, using terms, values and outcomes defined by the museum. In contrast, based on an understanding that heritage is about actively constructing and negotiating meaning, or 'meaning making' (Dicks 2000; Smith 2006; S. Macdonald 2013), qualitative research is being undertaken to explore what a museum visit means to visitors in their own words and on their own terms. This work (Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012; Smith 2015, 2016a, 2017) suggests that visitors

are far more active in constructing their own meanings and understandings than they are given credit.

In addition, the museum visitor studies that were conducted were likely to have been approached from a learning paradigm perspective that privileged supply and production (i.e., museum professionals) over demand and consumption (i.e., audiences) and undervalued the agency and authority of the visitor (Sandell 2002a; Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; S. Macdonald 2005; Mason 2006; Smith 2016b). This learning-based body of work has dominated and informed the museum audience research field for decades, including Simon's *The Participatory Museum* (2010), which drew on a learning framework developed by Falk and Dierking, Hein and others to understand audiences. Observed through this lens, learning is at the heart of the museum experience: it is not simply part of the visit, but is the purpose for the visit itself. Falk and Dierking (Falk and Dierking 1992, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2016; Falk and Storksdieck 2005; Falk 2016) are regarded as leaders in the study of learning in museums. Their work continues to influence many respected scholars in museum studies and over decades has been widely embraced by practitioners (Witcomb 2006; Simon 2010). One of their strongest contributions to the field is their advocacy for visitor agency. Falk and Dierking (1992) advocated that visitors are not 'empty vessels', which was a radical idea at the time and one that some practitioners still do not embrace. Falk and Dierking's (2000) 'contextual model of learning' helped museum practitioners to better understand and meet the needs of visitors based on the social, personal and physical context of the visitor. Falk and colleagues (Falk and Sheppard 2006; Falk, Dierking and Foutz 2007; Falk and Dierking 2016) acknowledged that many museums operated in twentieth-century models of mass production, consisting of a one-size-fits-all approach to meet the needs of customers. Their learning-based research contributed valuable knowledge about visitors at a time when museums were shifting their focus from their collections to visitors, and, in part, helped museum practitioners to better understand aspects of museum visitors' motivations and interactions during a visit.

However, for a long time, no-one had actually asked visitors whether education was the purpose of their museum visit (S. Macdonald 1990, 225). In fact, when visitors were asked to describe, in their own words, the purpose of their visit they only sometimes described education, while other explanations were more common, such as a day out with friends or family, recreation or an emotional experience (S. Macdonald 2002b; Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; Bounia et al. 2012; Smith 2015, 2016a). Sandell (1998, 403) suggested that the museum's emphasis on education emerged when museums needed to defend their public funding, and when museums were successful in obtaining funding to maintain their collections it was more likely when they had promoted educational outcomes. The learning paradigm allowed museums to receive funding while maintaining the status quo, and ensured museum professionals (i.e., curators and educators) remained central to understanding the museum experience and privileged the 'supply' end rather

than the 'demand' side of the exchange (Sandell 2002b; Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; S. Macdonald 2005; Mason 2006). As Smith (2015, 4) argued, 'ideas of authority and education/learning help to ensure that the museums, museum practices, and museum professionals become the central focus of analysis'.

New approaches that do not rely on a learning paradigm recognise visitor agency, and more forcefully acknowledge the authority and power of visitor meaning-making from more than the museum's production perspective (Hall 2010). These approaches to audience research contest the reliance on linear educational approaches to audience research. In addition to learning, these approaches explore emotion, perception, agency, affect and cognition as ways to more fully and accurately understand what visitors do when they visit a museum and heritage site as well as the multiple and complex meanings made by visitors. For example, Poria, Butler and Airey (2003, 244) concluded that an emotional experience was more likely when a heritage site (i.e., Jerusalem's Wailing Wall) was perceived as part of the tourist's heritage; however, the researchers found 'less clear associations' when learning was a motivation for visiting. Pekarik and Schreiber (2012) used data from entry and exit interviews over 12 years at US Smithsonian institutions to conclude that the 'museum presentation' (such as interpretive text, exhibition content, messages and displays) had 'little effect' on visitors who bring 'schemas' or 'scripts' to museum visits and then fulfil those scripts (act on them) during their visit. This 'demonstrates that expectation is a much larger factor in determining responses than are minor differences in museum or exhibition content or presentation' (Pekarik and Schreiber 2012, 494). The Smithsonian study (Pekarik and Schreiber 2012, 495) reinforced visitor agency, and challenged the value that museum professionals place on their own ability to change attitudes and their investment in traditional static modes of interpretation, such as wall text, recounting that 'those museum personnel who believe that a museum's mission is to communicate or transmit specific messages, feelings, or other experiences will need to appreciate that in general only visitors already attuned to seeking these experiences are likely to find them'. Further, Smith's (2015) over 4500 interviews with visitors to 45 museum and heritage sites across three countries found that several factors other than learning influenced a visit and a broader lens that included emotion was needed to understand the 'social, cultural, and political consequences of visiting a museum' (Smith 2015, 6; see also Smith 2016b). Smith's recent research (2017, 82) argued that visitors were reinforcing beliefs and affirming familial connections rather than acquiring new knowledge. This approach to audience research is in itself more open and democratic. Visitors are invited to use their own words to describe their visit and meaning-making without assuming that learning is taking place. Although these examples demonstrate an important shift towards recognising visitor agency through qualitative research, further work is required because many respected museum studies scholars continue to assess visitor reactions without ever talking to a visitor. Participation is a relatively new topic in museum studies, and apart from the few

studies of participation mentioned already in this chapter (Worts 1995; Gammon and Mazda 2007; Jensen and Grøn 2015) there is little audience research on visitor participatory experiences from either the visitors' or the museum's perspective. Moreover, there are no longitudinal studies of the effect of museum participation to provide a more expansive and deeper understanding of the ideas, concepts and themes that are presented during exit surveys. Longitudinal studies could also help to identify the meanings that visitors make and what is important to them during a visit to a museum exhibition. As such, there is a need for qualitative, longitudinal and interdisciplinary research of participatory experiences in museums.

In addition to the definitions of participation outlined earlier in this chapter, it is also valuable to distinguish what is not participation. Like 'democracy', 'participation' is a much-used term with multiple and conflicting definitions that can be used to obscure less admirable intentions, such as Adam's (1939) use of democracy to promote social control. Thus, in adopting a maximalist version of participation to guide this research, the pseudo-participation approach to consultation is rejected. Such approaches reveal the ways that intrinsic museum culture, processes and products prevent or exclude meaningful collaboration and power sharing with their communities. This manipulation and control is best illustrated in the case study by Lynch and Alberti (2010) of the Manchester Museum's *Revealing Histories: Myths about Race* exhibition. Sound intentions of a 'co-production' were expressed by the museum at the beginning of the process, but 'true collaboration in the sense of shared authority was seen as a limited offer and always controlled by the museum' (Lynch and Alberti 2010, 20).[4] To manage the inevitably strong emotions about the topic of racism from the community advisory group, the museum actively avoided conflict when disagreements emerged during discussions. The desire of museum staff to avoid discomfort sent a 'mixed message of participation', in which non-museum staff participants were not the 'partners' to the project as they had been named, but were placed in positions of 'beneficiaries' or 'clients' that ultimately preserved the power and authority of the museum. The resulting compromise sought consensus but ultimately failed to satisfy any of the stakeholders. Lynch and Alberti (2010, 20) argued in favour of 'discensus' and contestation to establish the museum as a '"contact zone" of true collaboration and co-production', and open up 'diverse interpretations of participation, democracy and divergent agendas'.

Observed through this light, participation is not consensus, as it can (and probably should) result in creative, cultural and professional disagreements. Although museums state proudly that they are safe places for dangerous ideas (Gurian 1995), there are multiple examples of museums ignoring contradictory ideas and voices, and setting out to avoid conflict (Ross 2004; Fouseki 2010, 189;

[4] A recent case study by Robinson (2017) drew on Lynch and Alberti's (2010) work to examine how the National Museum of Australia's *Encounters* exhibition did not achieve equity with participants, but rather compromised its engagement with Indigenous stakeholders to achieve the goals of the institution.

Smith and Fouseki 2011; Wilson 2011). For instance, museum professionals', and particularly curators', avoidance of conflict was identified by Wilson (2011) as being part of a 'curatorial complex' in which curators were risk averse, detached, neutral and reluctant to share responsibility, authority or authorship with the community (see also Pierson-Jones 1992; Witcomb 2003; F. Cameron 2006). As Smith and Fouseki (2011, 100) argued, 'contestation and dissent are an integral part to the consultation process … any collaborative project or consultation practice is ultimately about the negotiation of the distribution of resources of power'. This curatorial complex is an expression of the reticence to share or cede power, sustaining a museum sector that is controlling, unrepresentative and, therefore, undemocratic.

The gap between rhetoric and action is further illustrated in museum professionals' resistance to change (Sandell 2003; Spock 2009; Simon 2010; Black 2012). In a study of museum curators and directors, Ross (2004, 85) found that 'museums are resistant to the forces of change and reform'. Wilson (2011, 144) argued that achieving long-term changes to curatorial culture, roles and engagement with communities was unlikely to succeed if left to curatorial staff. Witcomb (2003, 167) observed that that some museum professionals responded defensively and angrily to criticism from academics of museum practice and culture, and professionals dismissed such feedback as being 'out of touch'. In contrast to this is advice from Adam (1939, 20), who advocated that 'democracies need to be challenged, irritated, and amused as well as educated in common understanding'. In the context of museums seeking to democratise, it could be argued that cultural institutions need to develop a thicker skin that can accommodate and respond to challenge and contests. To this end, Lynch and Alberti (2010) advocated for museums to embrace a 'radical trust'[5] in which the museum does not control the outcome of participation or the way it is approached. Relationships with stakeholders, communities and visitors before, during and after museum visits need to be more trusting, open, respectful, democratic and informed by robust visitor research. Radical trust does not demand agreement among all parties to be successful. It can accommodate conflict and 'discensus', as stated by Lynch and Alberti (2010, 30):

> For these encounters are also spaces of possibility, in which power can take a more productive and positive form. Participation in museums can be dynamic and surprising. What is called for is a radical trust in which the museum cannot control the outcome. There may be unanticipated consequences in relinquishing authority in this way but, as we have seen, there are unanticipated consequences even when the museum does not.

[5] I note that McLean (2007) also recommended that the museum sector adopt a radical trust approach, as promoted by the Web 2.0 online library community (Fichter 2006).

2.7 Conclusion

Despite a long and articulate history of rhetoric to democratise the museum sector, there is a similar body of evidence that demonstrates how museum institutions and their practitioners have resisted change and remained undemocratic in their actions, policies and practices. This is sustained by the power imbalance between museums and their visitors, museum professionals' reluctance to relinquish authority and their focus on collections and a lack of ability to negotiate and accommodate conflicting views when engaging with under-represented communities. Democratisation of the museum sector is long overdue, and should include accepting visitors' active construction and negotiation of meanings, respecting citizen expertise, being inclusive of diverse voices, audiences and experiences, embracing change, and supporting the interests of museum institutions while playing a responsible and activist role in broader society. Previous and failed attempts to democratise museums were founded on and assessed according to the values of museum institutional cultures that privilege expertise and remain one-sided, exclusive and, therefore, undemocratic. A maximalist model of participation, borrowed from political science (Pateman 1976, 2012; Stoker 2006) and teamed with ideas from Nina Simon's popular book, *The Participatory Museum* (2010) and participation advocate Carpentier (2011a), could help to realise the goals of the new museology and the current phase of museum studies with its social inclusion and activism agendas. This version of participation builds on Pateman's (1976, 2012) model, which provides mutual benefits, respect and shared decision-making, Melucci's (1989) definition, which shares power with visitors and benefits society, and supports Stoker's (2006) calls for citizens to be both trusted and supported to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. A model of participation in which the final decision is determined by the dominant party is unlikely to challenge the resistant and undemocratic values of museum institutional cultures. Recent attempts to democratise, such as participation, need to identify new and interdisciplinary ways to recognise and respond to the institutional cultures and issues that privilege expertise and conspire to ensure professional practice remains undemocratic. In the context of evolving debates about the new museology and social inclusion, it is necessary to understand the inconsistencies between, on the one hand, the rhetoric used by museum professionals and the ways they practice museum participation, with, on the other hand, the experiences and meaning making of visitors in participatory exhibitions. Theoretical grounding is needed, alongside qualitative, longitudinal and interdisciplinary research from the perspectives of visitors and museum professionals, to understand the effect and efficacy of participatory experiences and how power is mediated, negotiated and situated in museums. In this way, it will be possible to determine how participation can democratise the museum experience when many previous attempts have failed.

CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND

Background to the Power of 1

3.1 Introduction

The *Power of 1* exhibition, presented by MoAD, was one of the first opportunities to examine participatory museum experiences in an Australian context. With access to visitors, museum professionals, unpublished documents and visitor contributions, the overtly experimental *Power of 1* was an opportunity to develop new understandings and test emerging thinking in the field. The participatory exhibition, together with findings that Australian citizens had become disillusioned towards politics, was about participation in democracy and informed by questioning of the relevance of museums to diverse communities. The museum director's decision to engage mostly external collaborators and temporary contractors circumvented internal resistance to the unconventional project and unknowingly contributed to an environment redolent of Carpentier's (2011b) unattainable participatory fantasy. A radical trust positioned both the museum and visitors as participants and activated visitor agency to create a participatory exhibition experience that was shaped—visually, emotionally and intellectually—by the answers shared by visitors, with little or no filtering from a curator or other museum professional. To understand the results of this case study, the following background to the *Power of 1* provides necessary context to the museum, project, exhibition and Australian political environment.

3.2 The museum

3.2.1 Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House

MoAD opened in 2009, and its most recent strategic plan (2013–18) stated that it is 'a space not just to celebrate our democratic traditions, but also to truly collaborate with our audiences and stakeholders. We will embrace this opportunity to connect communities, encourage participation and value freedom' (MoAD 2013d). MoAD's approach to its contemporary exhibition program was informed by the new museological practices of the late twentieth century, and expressed through the presentation of contributions of both great and everyday people and the use of multimedia interactives. Its collection is primarily the building and the specially designed furniture in which it is housed—in many ways MoAD may be defined as a house museum (Young 2007)—although it has sought to develop a collection of significant items and ephemera.

MoAD is located in Old Parliament House (see Figure 3.1), the home of the Parliament of Australia between 1927 and 1988. Following debate about whether the building should be demolished, Old Parliament House opened to the public in 1992, including several significant heritage rooms, such as two parliamentary chambers and the prime minister's suite, that were interpreted to reflect Australia's political history. Since 1992, the building hosted at various times exhibitions by the National Museum of Australia, National Library of Australia and National Archives of Australia and was home to the National Portrait Gallery before it moved to a permanent building in late 2008. Old Parliament House has been managed by various government agencies and departments. At the time of this research, it was an agency of the Ministry for the Arts. Since the launch of MoAD in 2009 until the time of this research, MoAD consistently attracted around 80,000 children annually from interstate schools who were paid an incentive by the federal government to visit the attraction during excursions to Canberra. However, leisure visitation was relatively low compared with other national cultural institutions located in the capital. Annual reports (Australian War Memorial 2015; MoAD 2015c; National Gallery of Australia 2015; National Museum of Australia 2015; National Portrait Gallery 2015) from 2014–15 showed that although MoAD's visitation had increased to 246,970 on-site visits (including school and general visitations) from the previous year, it attracted fewer visitors than did other national cultural institutions, including the Australian War Memorial (1,140,814), the National Gallery of Australia (671,669), the National Museum of Australia (661,693) and the National Portrait Gallery (528,752).

Figure 3.1: MoAD, located at Old Parliament House, presented the Power of 1 exhibition from November 2014 to October 2015. The exhibition was promoted on a large banner hanging on the façade of the building. Photo R Coghlan

3.2.2 Old Parliament House

In 1923, Old Parliament House was designed to be a temporary and anti-monumental building to house the Australian federal parliament. It is a low-slung, wide, white building that has been extended over time to meet the growing needs of the 1927–88 federal parliament. Old Parliament House was designed by the first chief architect of the Commonwealth of Australia, John Smith Murdoch, to be 'simple, but decorous', in what was defined as an 'inter-war stripped classical style' (MoAD 2015b). I once heard Murdoch described as a control freak by one of the education officers at MoAD: Murdoch not only designed the building but also small items such as wastepaper baskets, ashtrays, chairs and tables. Murdoch designed and applied a motif reminiscent of the Union Jack that runs through the building from the railings to the furniture to the windows. Many visitors continue to call the building Old Parliament House, not MoAD; indeed, many Canberra street signs still refer to the building as Old Parliament House even though MoAD opened in 2009. As a heritage building, renovation programs are regularly undertaken. Unfortunately, about eight months after the exhibition opening, renovation works in the Kings Hall area blocked the front stairs and Kings Hall access to the exhibition and the *Power of 1* was mostly accessible and visible only to visitors who were deliberately seeking it out.

Figure 3.2: Building works at Old Parliament House reduced visibility of and access to the Power of 1 exhibition. Photo R Coghlan

3.2.3 Canberra

Canberra is a city conceived, planned, designed and built as a political capital. Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin won the 1911 Federal Capital Design Competition with a design for Canberra that gave form to a vision of an ideal democracy, expressing in their submission that:

> Australia, of most democratic tendencies and bold radical government, may well be expected to look upon her great future, and with it her Federal capital, with characteristic big vision. Australia has in fact, so well learned some of the lessons taught through modern civilisation, as seen in broad perspective from her isolated vantage point, that we may be justified in believing that she will fully express the possibilities for individual freedom, comfort and convenience for public spirit, wealth and splendour of the great democratic city ideal for which her capital offers the best opportunity so far. (Griffin, cited in Headon 2003, 42)

Old Parliament House is a highly recognised building in Australia, in part because many Australian school children visited it on excursions when it was a working parliament and because, for many years, it regularly appeared on the television news when journalists reported political events from its wide, white steps. The building was also the site for Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's famous speech on the day of his dismissal in 1975, in which his statement, 'Well may we say God save the Queen, because nothing will save the Governor General', can often be heard being quoted by visitors to Old Parliament House. When Whitlam died on 21 October 2014, flowers were left on MoAD's steps just weeks before the opening of the *Power of 1* exhibition.

3.3 The project

3.3.1 Fortieth anniversary of 18 year olds obtaining the right to vote

The year 2014 marked the fortieth anniversary of 18 year olds voting for the first time in an Australian election. The decision to lower the voting age from 21 years to 18 took place in the lead up to the 1974 federal election. The museum director wanted an exhibition developed to mark this anniversary, and an external researcher was engaged to develop some early concepts and possible directions (MoAD 2013b). The museum's curatorial team explored an object-based museum exhibition proposal, titled *From Activism to Apathy*, which contrasted 18 year olds' engagement with politics via an argument that baby boomers were engaged activists in 1974 while gen Y (or millennials) were apathetic in 2014. As project manager M7 stated in her interview, these early concepts 'didn't really have a lot of legs'.

I also felt concerned that the proposal was an example of baby boomers patronising other generations, in this case gen Y. I was asked by the museum director to develop an alternative concept and approach to mark the anniversary of young people participating in Australian elections and in the context of a broad acknowledgement that a traditional museum exhibition of objects was not going to succeed. The museum director was open to trialling new approaches and, thus, provided me with an opportunity to experiment with emerging ideas from within and outside the sector. The *Power of 1* was influenced by the ideas from Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum* (2010). Drawing on an aphorism, 'less of a lecture, more of a conversation', that gained popularity in the Web 2.0 world, I wanted to experiment with an exhibition approach that contrasted with

traditional, authoritative interpretation—we would engage visitors in a conversation about democracy, not tell them what to think (MoAD 2013c).

An aspect of the previous *From Activism to Apathy* proposal that resonated with many museum colleagues was the concept of generations as an entry point to the project. Generational stereotypes seemed to engage people, provoke debate and awaken nostalgia. I joked that generational profiles might not be any more accurate than horoscopes but they were an engaging and mostly understood entry point to explore the idea of young people's engagement with politics. During research for the proposal, I sought to develop a better understanding of the assumptions underpinning generations, and came upon a statement by social researchers that 'each generation is a factor of its times and a reaction to the generation that went before it' (McCrindle and Wolfinger 2009, 5). This statement, which was more sympathetic to and respectful of each generation, informed my proposal. Generational research by McCrindle and Wolfinger (2009) provided a lens to examine the key social and historical events that took place for the four most recent generations in the context of their relationship with the anniversary of 18 year olds voting for the first time in 1974. For instance:

- Baby boomers (born 1946–64) voted for the first time around 1974 during a period of economic security and optimism. Whitlam and Fraser were prime ministers during this time.
- Builders (born 1925–45) were in 1974 likely to be the parents of these new baby boomer voters; however, the builders grew up during the depression and had Menzies and Curtin as their prime ministers.
- Generation X (born 1965–79) were born around the time of the 1974 election and grew up with computers and both parents working. Hawke and Keating were prime ministers during this time.
- Gen Y/Z (born 1980–2010) were the optimistic children of the first-time baby boomer voters of 1974, and their prime ministers included Howard and Rudd (and, as it turned out, Gillard and Abbott and Turnbull).

The overtly experimental and participatory proposal was accepted by the museum director and became the *Power of 1* exhibition (MoAD 2013a). During the development phase, the process that evolved was also experimental and new to MoAD because of its lack of structure, informal roles, unconventional processes and short timeframe. The process was very open-ended, adapting to new ideas as they arose and sought to be creative, trusting, democratic and participatory. It is fair to say that this approach created an exciting, but at times stressful, environment for the project team and probably other MoAD staff in which to produce the exhibition. However, it was also an opportunity to trial an engaging approach to a potentially dry but important topic of young people's engagement with their democracy and to increase MoAD's visibility and relevance.

3.3.2 The team

Daryl Karp was appointed director of MoAD on 2 April 2013, following a 30-year career outside the museum sector in film and television. She was perceived as an energetic new director, who brought from the media sector a new (faster, cheaper and less rule-laden) perspective to telling stories in museum environments (Flannery and Sloan 2013). I was originally engaged by MoAD on a six-month temporary employment contract in April 2013 to develop a new strategic plan for the museum. However, this contract was extended and expanded to manage community engagement programs, incorporating exhibitions (including the *Power of 1*), events and digital and marketing communications. Before MoAD, I had been project director for the National Arboretum Project (run by the local government) and wanted to apply some of the different approaches, such as smaller budgets and community-led approaches, to a national cultural institution (where I had spent most of my career). I was appointed executive producer (a title that the museum director brought from the media sector, although she often referred to me as the curator) to the *Power of 1* because I had proposed the idea, and worked to the museum and deputy directors. My contract was completed on 12 December 2014, a month after the *Power of 1* opened to the public. An experienced project manager (already engaged on a temporary employment contract at MoAD) had been appointed to manage the procurement, contracts and logistical coordination of the project in September 2013. Three months prior to the exhibition opening, the project manager moved interstate and was replaced by an internal staff member. A new project manager would oversee the launch and post-opening exhibition maintenance. A senior historian developed historical content for the exhibition and a committee representing the executive managers and content, education, visitor services, heritage and curatorial managers regularly met to discuss the progress of the *Power of 1* and other exhibitions' development. Like any museum project, there were many people involved and I do not wish to diminish the involvement of the broader MoAD staff and partners in the project who were not individually named. However, this is not a detailed or ethnographic study of exhibition development, it is a study of how participation is received by visitors and perceived by museum professionals. It should be noted that most of the museum professionals, including external collaborators and internal (temporary employment contract) staff, who held major responsibility in the *Power of 1* project had completed their roles by the time or shortly after the launch of the exhibition.

The museum director wanted the project to open to the public in spring 2014 (less than a year after the project's approval) and this timeframe was very tight compared with typical museum exhibition production schedules (see Table 3.1.). Given these time constraints, and what the museum director described in her museum professionals interview as 'suspicion' from internal staff towards the project (M5), it was agreed that external contractors, some of whom came from the museum director's media sector networks, would be engaged to bring different perspectives to the project.

Table 3.1. Key dates for the Power of 1.

September–November 2013	Development of conceptual proposal, project goals, guiding principles Partnerships initiated
18 September 2013	Tony Abbott elected twenty-eighth Prime Minister of Australia
19 December 2013	Workshop with Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA) academic partners to finalise survey questions House of Representatives Chamber, Old Parliament House
20–31 January 2014	National baseline survey undertaken by Ipsos of 800 Australians: 200 from each of the four generations, with quotas for gender and location (metro/regional) across all states and territories (IPSOS 2014)
27 March 2014	IGPA provided a draft article for MoAD summarising the key findings from their analysis of the Ipsos online survey, *Young citizens—A sail and not an anchor for the ship of Australian democracy* (IGPA 2014)
4 June 2014	Workshop for external collaborators and internal staff Senate Committee Room, Old Parliament House, Canberra IGPA presented their analysis of the national baseline survey results
August 2014	Project Manager (M7) left MoAD to take-up new interstate position New project manager (M9) appointed
10 October 2014	Exhibition preview for TedX participants, used as an opportunity to pilot the participatory interactives and populate the space
12 November 2014	Exhibition opening event, including a public conversation with representatives from each of the generations IGPA report based on the Ipsos survey, *The Power of One Voice—Power, powerlessness and Australian democracy*, released to the public (Evans, Halupka and Stoker 2014)
12 December 2014	Executive producer left MoAD
6 January 2015 7 January 2015 8 January 2015 20 January 2015 21 January 2015 21 August 2015 19 September 2015	Fieldwork—visitor interviews
11 February 2015 20 February 2015 24 February 2015 5 March 2015 13 March 2015 4 August 2015 5 August 2015	Fieldwork—museum professionals' interviews
21 July 2015	Fieldwork—Participant observation Kings Hall conservation work, consisting of painting and plastering, and external rendering covered the *Power of 1* banner with scaffolding. New visitor entry resulted in temporary cloaking desk with no promotion of the *Power of 1* exhibition
29 July 2015 4 August 2015 5 August 2015 7 August 2015 8 August 2015 12 August 2015 19 August 2015 21 August 2015	Follow-up visitor interviews
14 September 2015	Malcolm Turnbull defeated Tony Abbott in Liberal Party leadership spill to become Australia's twenty-ninth Prime Minister of Australia (and Australia's fourth prime minister in two years)
19 September 2015	Fieldwork—additional visitor interviews following change in prime ministership
11 October 2015	*Power of 1* exhibition closed to the public

Following tender processes or various negotiations, the following organisations were engaged as partners to the collaborative *Power of 1* project:

- Ipsos Social Research Institute was commissioned by MoAD to conduct the 2013–14 national baseline online survey of 800 Australians' attitudes to democracy (paid contract).
- IGPA, University of Canberra (formerly the Australian New Zealand Institute of Governance) were engaged as research partners to help develop the questions for the Ipsos survey, analyse survey data, review exhibition content and provide academic context and rigour (in kind, no fee).
- Marcelle Lunam designed the look and feel for the project and produced video interviews of everyday people's attitudes to democracy (paid contract).
- MOD Productions developed the multimedia and exhibition design (including engaging a theatre set designer) for the *Power of 1* (paid contract).
- University of Canberra Faculty of Architecture and Design conceived the tangible data visualisation (column installation) (in kind, no fee).
- In The Thicket developed the audio-visual material for the exhibition, including interviews with well-known Australians about their attitudes to democracy (paid contract).
- SBS digital developed a new web-based survey interactive (based on the Ipsos survey) (in kind, no fee).

3.3.3 Activating visitor and citizen agency

The exhibition was informed by ongoing questioning of the relevance of museums to diverse communities, together with findings that were demonstrated in IGPA's survey of political engagement that Australian citizens had become disillusioned towards politics (Evans, Stoker and Nasir 2013). In response to this disillusionment, the idea behind the *Power of 1* exhibition was 'you have a voice. It counts. (It always has.) Have your say and be heard' that was developed with an aim for visitors 'to discover the changing nature of Australian democracy and the power of their voice within it' (MoAD 2014b). The exhibition was created as an expression of a new strategic plan by MoAD that sought 'to shape a fresh role for the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House for Canberra and the nation—as a new kind of town square built around the democratic principles of equality, freedom, justice and representation' (MoAD 2013d). The *Power of 1* exhibition influenced a change in MoAD's overall focus, in which it now defines its purpose as 'to understand and celebrate the spirit of Australian democracy and the "power of your voice" within it' (MoAD 2016, 4).

The exhibition was conceived as an overt attempt to activate visitor agency, inviting visitors to voice their personal responses that would then change the content of the exhibition. The exhibition experience was shaped—visually, emotionally and intellectually—by the answers shared by visitors, with little or no filtering from a curator or other museum professional. The terms of use for the exhibition encouraged visitors to act respectfully and that 'racist, sexist, homophobic, obscene, or

threatening' commentary would be removed (MoAD 2014a). Visitor contributions were left in the exhibition gallery (physically or digitally) for other visitors to explore, and through this the visitor contributions curated and shaped the exhibition. I often encouraged my museum and project colleagues to show confidence in visitors, embrace risk for the project and to 'set it free'. Although the term 'radical trust' was unknown to me at the time, I was (on reflection) trusting visitors to do the right thing and was, thus, demonstrating a form of 'radical trust'[6] (McLean 2007; Lynch and Alberti 2010). This approach enabled us to 'build something without setting in stone what it will be or trying to control all that it will be [and, thus] … allow and encourage participants to shape and sculpt and be co-creators of the system' (Fichter 2006). Although initially cautious, MoAD executives approved this approach after processes were in place to moderate and monitor visitor contributions, both tangible and digital, to ensure compliance with the agreed terms of use.

3.3.4 Australian attitudes to democracy

As noted, MoAD commissioned Ipsos to conduct a quality-assured, national online survey of 800 Australians and their attitudes to democracy, using quotas to ensure representation across the four generations of Australians—builders (1925–45), boomers (1949–64), gen X (1965–79) and gen Y/Z (1980–2010)—as well as gender, location and cultural diversity (Ipsos 2014). IGPA played a key role in framing and defining the survey questions in line with current research about political engagement. Once complete, the survey data were provided to IGPA for analysis. IGPA (Evans, Halupka and Stoker 2014; IGPA 2014) found that Australians were very dissatisfied with the nature of politics on offer, which, the report argued, was associated with the image of the 'untrustworthy contemporary politician'. The IGPA (2014) report challenged the negative stereotypes of younger generations (including those expressed by the 'Activism to Apathy' curatorial proposal) when it found that members of gen Y/Z were leading the way in embracing new forms of democratic participation and were not an apathetic generation as portrayed by the media. I drew conclusions from the national survey results and analysis to define the 'big idea' (Serrell 2015), key themes and provocations in the exhibition (MoAD 2014d).

Following analysis of the Ipsos survey data by IGPA, a workshop was convened with the project partners to develop a shared understanding of the scope, desired outcomes and ambition of the project and to stimulate and exchange ideas about their areas of expertise. All partners agreed that the exhibition should be entertaining, highly visual and consciously different from a typical museum experience (MoAD 2014c). The *Power of 1* was intended to be a cross-platform and collaborative-

6 'Radical trust' is a concept introduced in response to Web 2.0 activities by libraries to encourage participation by online communities. It acknowledges that shared authority between producers and users can shape a culture of behaviour more effectively than through control measures.

engagement project in which the museum curated an exhibition as well as conversations with visitors (MoAD 2013c). As a result, its guiding principles were:

- conversational rather than unidirectional
- engaging and relevant rather than simply didactic
- generative of content and open-ended rather than finite and closed
- sustainable across platforms, communities and time
- able to become 'smarter', more effective and useful the more they are used (MoAD 2013c).

The museum director's decision to engage mostly external collaborators and temporary staff to pursue the participatory and unconventional approach for the *Power of 1* was, in part, to circumvent internal resistance known to exist at MoAD towards the project. This decision, which outsourced a large proportion of the exhibition development to collaborators who shared a desire to experiment, valued the agency of the individual and were open to take risks and trial new ideas, was successful in many ways. The *Power of 1* opened, as scheduled, in spring 2014 and invited visitors to have their say about engaging with democracy using ideas drawn from Simon's *The Participatory Museum* (2010). Although the project team was unconscious of this at the time, the alignment of decisions, team members, frustrations about Australian politicians, rise in social media and citizen experts and democratic guiding principles underpinning the project resulted in an environment redolent of Carpentier's (2011a) unachievable maximalist vision for participation. Carpentier's utopian participatory fantasy, which positioned the visitor and the museum as participants, was unknowingly applied to enable this case study to apply a radical trust to cede control to all parties, not only during the development process but through most of the exhibition product delivery.

Figure 3.3: A shoe installation (left) at the entry to the Power of 1 (right), located opposite the historic House of Representatives Chamber. Photos R Coghlan 2014/15

3.4 The exhibition

3.4.1 Entry

Entry to the *Power of 1* exhibition was usually via the main stairs of Old Parliament House, then up to Kings Hall and to the left. This was a highly visible and accessible gallery for visitors; unfortunately, as noted, about eight months after the exhibition's opening, renovation works prevented visitor access via Kings Hall and the main stairs, and the exhibition was mostly accessible and visible only to those who were deliberately seeking it out (see Figure 3.2). On arrival to the exhibition gallery, there were two large banners on either side of the entry that asked, 'Does your voice count?' Once inside the exhibition gallery and past the timber and glass doors with original gold painted numbers ('M102'), visitors could see a shoe installation with red strings (see Figure 3.3). The display of shoes of varying sizes and eras was designed to be a visual cue to communicate that this was a different kind of museum exhibition. Beyond the entry to the exhibition was a light-filled verandah space that linked the rooms of the exhibition gallery and hosted the iPad stands with which visitors could access previous visitors' digital contributions. The verandah was once an outdoor space (before it was enclosed to provide more office space, as the parliament grew too big for the provisional building) and has a concrete and tiled floor (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: A light-filled verandah space linked the various rooms in the Power of 1 and hosted the iPad stands to access other visitors' digital contributions. Photos: R Coghlan 2014/15

3.4.2 Generation rooms

The exhibition design by MOD Productions and their theatre set designer aimed to develop a look and feel unlike a typical museum exhibition. The rooms were designed to signify that something new and different was being attempted. Each room included AV footage from the era, an opportunity to participate and some props (no original collection items), and was designed to evoke the era of the generation it represented. A text panel on the wall of each room introduced the generation and listed the main findings from the Ipsos national baseline survey that related to that

generation. The headline findings of the Ipsos survey that were analysed by IGPA, including likes, dislikes, how Australians participate and the changes Australians want, were used to frame and define the provocations in each of the generation rooms (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Summary of the participatory activity in each generation room.

Generation	**Builders Born 1925–45 Now in their 70–80s**	**Boomers Born 1946–64 Now in their 50–60s**	**Gen X Born: 1965–79 now in their 30–40s**	**Gen Y and Z Born: 1980–2010 now in their 20s to early 30s**
Provocation (and research theme)	What do you like about Australian democracy (likes)?	What don't you like about Australian democracy (dislikes)?	Tell us about your experience of democracy (participation).	What would you like to change about Australian democracy (change)?
Participatory device	Write your response using a pen and paper. The response is then photographed and uploaded to the exhibition.	Record your response using a 1960s-style audio recording. The response is then uploaded to the exhibition.	Type your response using a Commodore64 keyboard. The response is then uploaded to the exhibition.	Record your response using an iPod video selfie. The response is then uploaded to the exhibition.
Device type Tangible/digital Open-ended/ structured Self-directed/ facilitated Anonymous/public	Tangible (with digital upload element) Open-ended Self-directed Anonymous	Digital Structured (maximum six seconds) Self-directed Anonymous (voice recorded)	Digital Structured (maximum 126 characters) Self-directed Anonymous	Digital Unstructured but with a six-second time limit Self-directed Public

The Builders Room (see Figure 3.5) was designed to represent the experiences of people who were born between 1925 and 1945 and in their 70s and 80s. The room was transformed into a 1930s- or 1940s-style space: wallpaper, the beautiful, narrow original timber flooring of the parliament building was visible and there was an old desk (a prop rather than an item from the MoAD furniture collection because of conservation concerns) with a rug underneath. A swinging soundtrack that was pacey, happy and upbeat played in the background. There was footage of fashion and political newsreels on the walls, as well as some movie posters and interviews with people from the builder generation about their attitudes to democracy. In each room, there was a provocation: a question designed to provoke an answer in the participatory activities or simply prompt discussion or reflection. In the Builders Room, visitors were asked, 'What do you like about Australian democracy?' Answers could be written on a notepad on the desk using a pencil, and visitors could take a photo of what they had written using a hidden camera installed in the desk lamp. Once visitors had taken the photo, they would hear a bell and a recorded voice thanking them for 'joining the conversation'. All contributions were then available to be viewed on the iPod kiosk outside the Builders Room.

Figure 3.5: The Builders Room (left) and the Boomers Room (right). Photos R Coghlan

The Boomers Room (see Figure 3.5) represented people born between 1946 and 1964 and in their 50s and 60s. It was a very visual room and was given a 1950s feel, including white vinyl floor coverings and a large, wire, sixties rocket installation to house the exhibition's footage and content, to contrast with the heritage space. There were no original or heritage objects on display, but there were facsimiles and props, such as an Albert Namatjira painting, records, a Dame Edna wig and glasses and old TVs. A loud, rocking soundtrack played in this room, making it feel fun. The provocation in this room was, 'What do you dislike about Australian democracy?' After pressing a button that triggered a flashing light, visitors could record, within six seconds, their voices and answers to the question via an in-built microphone on the rocket. Visitors could review their own and other visitors' audio contributions on the iPad kiosk outside the Boomers Room. Visitors could also listen to the contributions from other visitors in the room using a set of headphones.

The Gen X Room (see Figure 3.6) represented the experiences of people born between 1965 and 1979 and in their 30s and 40s at the time of the exhibition. On display were a range of shoes, records and movie posters from that time, and AV material that showed a gen X woman saying that, on election day, she liked to pass the hawkers with the how-to-vote cards and only collect the card from the candidate to whom she would place her vote. The Gen X Room was bright and colourful, transforming the heritage space with colours and imagery from that generation. There were candy-pink carpet tiles, a large neon-coloured wall that was used to suspend props, AV content and interviews. The provocation in this room was, 'Tell us about your experience of democracy'. A computer monitor screened AV footage and invited visitors to 'press any key' on an old Commodore64 keyboard to answer the provocation. As with the other spaces, responses from the Gen X Room were designed to be loaded on the iPod kiosk outside the room.

Figure 3.6: The Gen X Room (left) and Gen Y and Beyond Room (right). Photos R Coghlan

The Gen Y and Beyond Room (see Figure 6) was transformed to reflect a contemporary feel. It consisted of a bold design, with multiple iPods suspended from the ceiling and no props or facsimiles on display. As such, it was the most successful expression that the *Power of 1* was not a typical museum exhibition, as illustrated by the many comments from visitors about the room's display. This room represented people from gen Y (and beyond) who were born between 1980 and 2010 and who, at the time of the exhibition, were aged up to their early 30s. There was shiny, red vinyl flooring, iPods, a text panel on the wall with some shoes and a spot on the floor explaining how to record a selfie video. In this room, visitors were invited to record a video in response to the provocation, 'What would you change about Australian democracy?' Visitors had six seconds to record their response, and as there was a visual to cue the start and end of the recording the process was clearly communicated and easy to use. Video responses were uploaded on the iPod stand outside the room (although the iPod stand was removed from display during the exhibition).

Figure 3.7: The Tally Room with the column installation (left) and the secret ballot participatory activity (right). Photos R Coghlan

3.4.3 Tally Room

The Tally Room (see Figure 3.7) was a large room at the west end of the gallery space with an arch window framing a view of Mount Ainslie and the Aboriginal tent embassy, which has staged its protest since 1972. This was transformed into a stark white room. Everything, including the floors, walls and ceilings, was white, except for the original timber picture rails and architraves, the colour coding on the column installations and the chalk on the graffiti wall. At the centre of the Tally Room were four clusters of column installations, or tangible data visualisations, that illustrated the results of the Ipsos national baseline survey of Australians' attitudes to democracy. These installations were designed by the project partners from the University of Canberra Faculty of Architecture and Design. Like each of the generation rooms, each cluster represented the headline findings of the research, including likes, dislikes, how Australians participate and the changes Australians want. According to the installation's designers, the aim of the tangible data visualisation was for visitors to 'locate themselves in a field of data'. Visitors were observed spending time interpreting the data on the columns and reading the graffiti wall, secret ballot display and message tree. In this room, numerous comments, messages and marks were left by visitors in response to the different participatory activities, including tangible, open-ended, self-directed and anonymous (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Summary of the participatory activity of the Tally Room.

Graffiti wall **Complete the sentence, 'My voice counts because …'**	**Secret ballot** **Complete the sentence, 'I'd fight for my right to …'**	**Message tree** **Visitors can write anything they want.**	**Ballot box** **Use a ping-pong ball to answer yes/no to a changing question (e.g., the voting age should be lowered to 16).**	**Complete an online survey (takes 10 minutes), which replicates the question in the national survey.**
Tangible Structured (limited by space available) Self-directed Public (very public—a large-scale performative act to contribute to this wall)	Tangible Open-ended (but could run out of space) Self-directed Anonymous (completed in a private voting booth and staff install the cards for display)	Tangible Open-ended (but could run out of space) Self-directed Public, but can be completed discretely	Tangible Structured Self-directed Public	Digital Structured Self-directed Anonymous

The secret ballot included a voting booth, pencils and thick card that visitors used to privately (in an election booth-style structure) complete the provocation statement, 'I'd fight for my right to …' Visitors then posted the card through a slot. A museum staff member installed the cards on the pegs on the wall to create an attractive and large-scale display (see Figure 3.7). To the right of the secret ballot was the message tree (see Figure 3.8), an abstract tree structure made of plywood with a very open and unstructured provocation, 'I want to say'. It was often overloaded with comments from visitors.

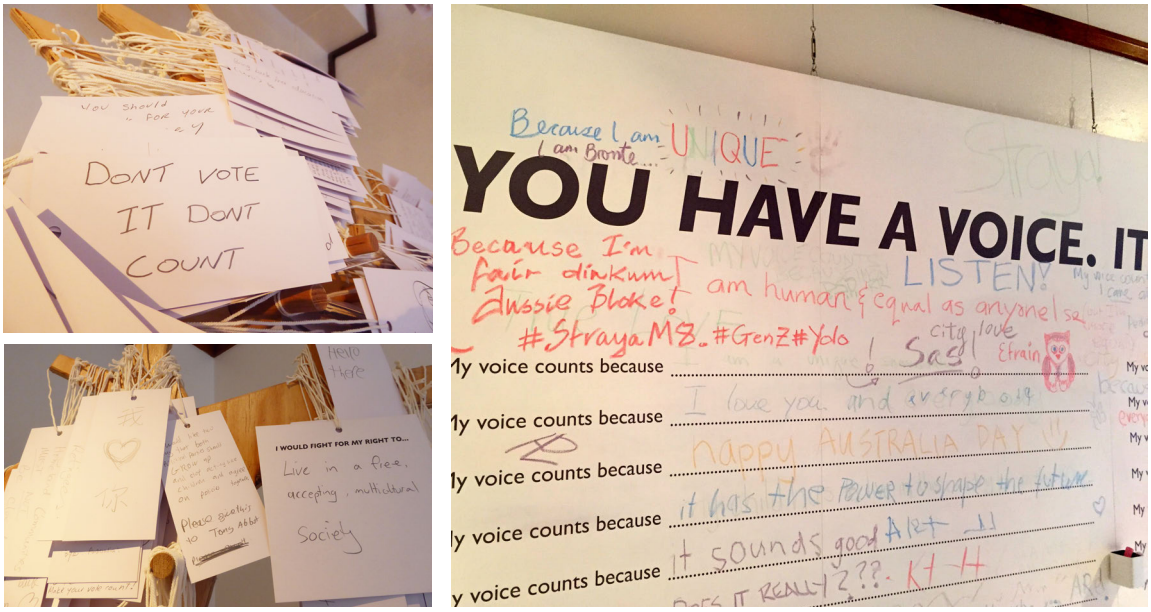


Figure 3.8: The message tree (left) had a very open and unstructured provocation for visitors to respond to, 'I want to say …' and the graffiti wall (right) invited visitors to complete the sentence, 'my voice counts because …' Photos R Coghlan

The graffiti wall (see Figure 3.8) was a giant, white chalkboard that invited visitors to complete the sentence, 'My voice counts because …' Often visitors commented on previous contributions from visitors and it became chaotic and dynamic. At times, staff cleaned the wall and the comments became neater and more controlled. The wall was often commented on by visitors when they mentioned other visitor contributions. Visitors left some of the most thoughtful comments or engaged in conversations on the secret ballot and message tree relating to democracy, politics, politicians, current affairs and human rights (see Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: Visitors left a range of thoughtful comments on the secret ballot and message tree, sometimes engaging in conversations with other visitors. Photos R Coghlan

In the early days of the exhibition, there was a large, rectangular-shaped vertical plinth in the corner of the Tally Room housed iPads that visitors could use to contribute to the SBS web-based survey interactive and review the digital visitor contributions (see Figure 3.10). Around March 2015, the plinth was removed to make space for an evening public event in the gallery and was not replaced. An iPad was later installed on the verandah space to encourage people to complete the survey interactive. The web-based survey interactive reflected the questions that were asked during the Ipsos national baseline survey and took around 10 minutes for visitors to complete.

The Tally Room also included a ping-pong ballot box (see Figure 3.10) with a question that was designed to change every month, although I only saw two different questions during my visits. One provocation in the ping-pong ball interactive stated that 'representatives should be part-time and work in the real world', and visitors could answer either yes or no by placing a green ping-pong ball in the slot that represented their answer. Visitors could see how others had voted before they cast their own vote.

Figure 3.10. The online survey interactive was originally located on a column in the Tally Room (left) (image courtesy Mark Nolan 2014). The ping-pong ballot (right). Photo R Coghlan

3.5 The political environment

3.5.1 Prime minister Tony Abbott

Tony Abbott, a Liberal (conservative) Member of Parliament, was voted in as the twenty-eighth Prime Minister of Australia following a federal election on 7 September 2013. His prime ministership closed a two-term period of Labor rule that was characterised by leadership changes (from Kevin Rudd to Julia Gillard and back to Kevin Rudd) and, finally, a Labor-led minority government that required the support of the Greens and Independents. It was a tumultuous time

for Australian politics. However, Tony Abbott would go on to become a prime minister with some of the lowest approvals and highest unpopularity ratings in Australian history (AAP 2015). Many of his policies relating to budget cuts of the public broadcaster, immigration and refugees, education, same-sex marriage, the environment and women's rights were considered unfair and out of date by progressive voters, and this had provoked citizens to speak up and have their say during the *Power of 1* exhibition. His prime ministership was cut short when Malcolm Turnbull, who defeated Tony Abbott in a Liberal Party leadership spill on 14 September 2015, became Australia's twenty-ninth prime minister. Turnbull was Australia's fourth prime minister in two years, which continued the legacy of frequent leadership changes. At the time of most of the visitor interviews (including the follow-up interviews), Abbott was in power; however, additional visitor interviews were conducted on the weekend following Turnbull's swearing in as prime minister.

3.6 Conclusion

The *Power of 1* project was a unique opportunity to trial participatory museum ideas as part of an exhibition that was itself about participation in democracy. The unprecedented encouragement from the museum director to experiment, take risks and consciously present the exhibition as a new kind of experience in a museum context presented an opportunity to test new approaches from both within and outside the sector and to address some shortcomings in traditional museum practice. In part, some of this was possible because MoAD had low visitation and was prepared to take risks. However, the speed of change and the challenge this presented to colleagues who were more comfortable with traditional museum methodologies should not be underestimated: there was much stress and some resentment towards the project during its development. The short timeframe to develop the exhibition resulted in little or no time to pilot or evaluate the participatory activities (especially the digital interactives) before they were launched to the public, and early on it was clear there were some stability and maintenance issues. The *Power of 1* exhibition needed to be evaluated in full in the public gaze and then as a subject of this case study. Fortunately, the reliance on external partners who were open to and excited by the experimental approach mitigated some of these risks. The presence of an unpopular Tony Abbott and his government's particularly unpopular policies (especially among the mostly progressive visitors to MoAD) gave visitors something to talk about during the exhibition. When I left MoAD one month after the exhibition opened to the public, the development and launch phases of the *Power of 1* project had mostly been delivered according to the vision. I felt appreciative for the opportunity to trial different participatory approaches in such an explicitly experimental context that resembled aspects of a maximalist and unattainable utopian participation fantasy. I had already planned and gained approval to use the *Power of 1* as a case study for my independent PhD research and looked forward to gaining an understanding—particularly from the visitors' perspective but also from the perspectives of museum colleagues and external partners—of whether the participatory exhibition

was understood, how participation (an untraditional interpretive approach) was received by visitors and perceived by staff and how the exhibition evolved over time with the addition of visitors' comments and perspectives. It is in this way that MoAD's *Power of 1* exhibition became, with access to visitors, museum professionals, unpublished documents and visitor contributions, one of the first opportunities to examine participatory experiences in an Australian context to develop new understandings and test emerging thinking in the field.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Research methods and design

4.1 Introduction

For over a century, museums have claimed that they will democratise, need to democratise or have a new idea or approach about how they are going to democratise (Boas 1907; Dana 1917; Halpin 1997; Abt 2006; S. Macdonald 2006; Fleming 2014). However, despite this apparent commitment to democracy, a range of issues and institutional cultures that privilege expertise conspire to ensure professional practice remains undemocratic, exclusive and one-sided. This tends to result in the retention of curatorial control and a professional culture that resists change. Participation—in which visitors are invited to leave a comment, co-create or contribute to exhibitions—has promised to democratise museums by accommodating multiple perspectives, being relevant to and inclusive of diverse audiences and respecting and activating visitor agency. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, although participation is the latest trend adopted by the museum sector, it needs additional theoretical grounding that is supported by qualitative, longitudinal, mixed-method and interdisciplinary research. One example of the museum sector's undemocratic history is its approach to audience research. Assumptions by museum professionals about visitors are largely untested, and when they are researched they often rely on shallow quantitative approaches that invite visitors to determine, on a five- to seven-point scale, their level of agreement with statements about the museum. Several scholars (S. Macdonald 1990; Sandell 2002a; Smith 2015) indicated that this bias was also manifested in the learning paradigm advocated by Falk and Dierking (Falk and Dierking 1992, 2000, 2016; Falk 2016), which has dominated much audience research, privileges supply and production (i.e., museum professionals) over demand and consumption (i.e., visitors) and assumes that learning is not simply part of a museum visit but the purpose itself. A case study of MoAD's *Power of 1* exhibition, with access to visitors, museum professionals, unpublished documents and visitor contributions, was an opportunity to examine participatory experiences in an Australian context to develop new understandings and test emerging thinking in the field. To answer the broad research question of how participation can democratise museums when many previous attempts appear to have failed, a research methodology and design was developed that built on the substantial and qualitative research of Smith (2015, 2016b, 2017) to examine two critical perspectives of the visitor and the museum professional. The research sought to recognise the agency and active meaning-making of visitors to examine how visitors, in their own words,

perceive, understand and make meaning from participatory museum experiences (see also Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; S. Macdonald 2005; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012). The research design also encouraged museum professionals to reflect on the development and delivery of the participatory exhibition to determine how museum practice extends, supports, challenges or hinders visitor participation. Qualitative techniques were used, including semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observations and document analysis, and were supported by mixed-method and interdisciplinary research. This methodology was used to compare and contrast museum professionals' expectations of visitor engagement with the actual experiences of visitors (at the time of their visit and again months later) to answer the research question and generate new insights into this emerging museum trend.

4.2 Background

Participation appears to hold great promise for the museum sector. As outlined in Chapter 2, activating visitor agency, encouraging museum professionals to share power and transforming museums as a platform for social good both at the time of visit and beyond its walls encourages active, engaged and connected citizens. Nina Simon's (2010) book, *The Participatory Museum*, has been embraced by the museum sector and promotes participation to encourage meaningful community dialogue and 'valuable civic and learning experiences' (Simon 2010, 351). As identified in Chapter 3, Simon's work was influential in the development of the experimental and highly participatory *Power of 1* exhibition at MoAD, the subject of this case study. The research question started with an interest to understand the efficacy and effect of participatory experiences in museums using the *Power of 1* exhibition as a case study. However, after exploring the history, theory and practice of museum participation and examining the work of other participation writers and scholars across disciplines, including political science and development studies (see Chapter 2), it was apparent that the research question needed a wider scope to examine how power is mediated, negotiated and situated in museums. For instance, since the establishment of public museums in the nineteenth century to the present day, museums have claimed that they will democratise, need to democratise or have a new idea or approach about how they will democratise (Boas 1907; Dana 1917; Halpin 1997; Abt 2006; S. Macdonald 2006; Fleming 2014). Nevertheless, throughout their history, museums and, specifically, museum professionals have been undemocratic in the way they retain control, resist change and avoid sharing power with their visitors. Further, visitors are underestimated by museum professionals, and insufficient qualitative audience research has been undertaken to understand how visitors, in their own words, perceive, understand and make meaning from museum experiences as a whole, let alone participatory museum experiences. Thus, a more layered and complex research question emerged: In the context of evolving debate about the new museology and social inclusion, how can museum participation address the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and democratise museums (to become relevant, responsible,

diverse and multi-vocal platforms for the wider social good) when many previous attempts have failed? With this expanded research interest, it was clear that a qualitative, mixed-method, longitudinal and interdisciplinary research methodology and design was the most suitable approach to address the research question.

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research was deemed the most suitable methodology to answer the full scope of the research question in the context of the *Power of 1* case study. This approach was informed by the work of leading researchers who recognised the agency and active meaning-making of museum visitors (Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012; Smith 2015). It was also a conscious attempt to subvert the supply-led, dominant learning paradigm to seek an in-depth understanding of visitors' experiences and perspectives of museum participation. An open research methodology was developed that could generate rich descriptions from visitors' own words and allow concepts and theories to emerge from the research. Unlike quantitative research that originated in scientific environments, qualitative research tends to take place in natural study settings, which suited this study and its museum context (Snape and Spencer 2004, 5).

There have been numerous debates about the merits and limitations of diverse qualitative research methods and approaches (Ormston et al. 2014; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2015). For the purpose of this case study, the following clarifications are required. First, I acknowledged that a critical realist ontology of the world exists independent of our beliefs and understanding, and that the usefulness of theories could be assessed based on evidence from the real world (Bhaskar 2013). Second, epistemologically, I reflected an interpretivist stance that a researcher's role is always subjective, visitors were almost always aware they were being studied and, therefore, the research was interactive and interdependent of the researcher (Schaffer 2000; Pachirat 2006, 2011). These perspectives were critical for this case study because I filled, at different times, the roles of case study researcher, curator and project manager of the *Power of 1* exhibition. The reflexivity required to support these positions is discussed further below.

In addition to the interpretivist stance, for pragmatic reasons the methodology used an integrated mixed-method approach and interdisciplinary research (drawing on political science) to best answer the specific research question, as encouraged by Snape and Spencer (2004, 21). The mixed approach incorporated the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative techniques allowed themes and ideas to emerge from the data and provided a deeper and broader context and structure in which to report the findings, and the quantitative techniques helped to

clearly communicate the key findings and insights and organise the personal reflections of the interviewees (Greene and Caracelli 1997).

4.3.2 Case study selection

The research project was based on a 12-month case study of several participatory approaches (e.g., digital and tangible, structured and open-ended, facilitated and self-directed and anonymous and public) in the cross-platform *Power of 1* exhibition, held at MoAD at Old Parliament House, Canberra, from November 2014. MoAD provided written permission to conduct interviews with their visitors, staff, contractors and collaborators. MoAD also provided access to unpublished internal documents, visitor contributions and usage statistics. Single-site case studies allow for the close examination of one particular variable, such as participation. However, single-site case studies are limited in their ability to make generalisations to broader contexts; therefore, as noted by social scientists George and Bennett (2005, 25), the *Power of 1* case study enabled the assessment of whether or how participation mattered, rather than how much it mattered.

4.3.3 Research objectives

Drawing from original research into the views of visitors and museum professionals and MoAD's internal documents, this project compared and contrasted museum professionals' expectations of visitor engagement with the actual experiences of visitors to meet the following objectives:

1. to determine the consequences for both visitors and the museum of visiting a participatory exhibition
2. to understand who does and does not participate to determine if there are profiles for participants and non-participants
3. to understand the attributes of effective participation and if it is valued and by whom
4. to determine how different participatory experiences (e.g., digital and tangible, structured and open-ended, facilitated and self-directed and anonymous and public) compare in terms of visitor engagement, and the ways they influence the value of the experience
5. to understand whether participatory experiences in museum environments are effective in meaning-making.

This research did not test any specific hypotheses, but posed questions and sought answers regarding a new way of producing exhibitions and seeking audience engagement in a museum setting. Attempts were made to map a range of behaviours and the consequences of participatory, visitor-directed experiences for the purpose of enhancing visitor engagement, audience development, business practices and interpretation strategies. The project was conceived in response to gaps in the knowledge and understanding of audience research in a museum context, as there has been 'surprisingly little assessment' (Gammon and Mazda 2007, 26) of participation from

the perspectives of the museum and visitor and only occasional research into 'how curators experience and perceive their work' (Wilson 2011, 132).

4.4 Trustworthiness of data

4.4.1 Researcher's role

For over 20 years, I have worked in Australia's national cultural institutions in Canberra, including the National Museum of Australia and the National Portrait Gallery, in audience engagement roles, such as public programs, audience research, marketing and exhibitions. I am now the CEO and artistic director of a not-for-profit community arts organisation and design festival. Twice in my career I have worked at Old Parliament House (now MoAD), and both times were formative experiences. I love the architecture and history of the building and its relationship to the development of my home city. My most recent paid role at Old Parliament House was as manager of community engagement for MoAD, a position I left in December 2014. I was responsible for the full continuum of visitor engagement, from exhibitions to events to digital marketing. The museum director provided me with the opportunity to curate and lead exhibitions, and this is how I created the *Power of 1* and was able to experiment with the current trend of participation in museums. As I had not previously been a curator and knowing how respected and tightly held that title is in a museum, I lacked the confidence to use that title. However, the organisation was undergoing significant strategic change and the museum director was prepared to take risks, trial new ideas and introduce external contractors and ideas to support her vision. For me, it was exciting to be given such freedom and responsibility, but for some museum staff it may have caused unsettling and potentially threatening change and challenges to them personally and professionally.

I had been enrolled as a PhD candidate at the Australian National University since 2010 but had lost interest in my original topic of family learning in museums. I saw that the *Power of 1* project was a valuable research opportunity to learn from the experimental exhibition approach and development process. After more than 20 years in the museum sector, I respected the potential of museums and the value of their collections, staff, buildings and resources to the broader community. I had observed museum experiences engage and delight visitors of all ages, bring communities together, share important and sometimes uncomfortable histories and present beautiful and significant collections. I had also observed visitors walk past exhibition captions and text panels without reading them and perceived that some exhibitions had little or no effect on the community even though they had cost many hours and dollars to create. I had noted audience research reports being rejected by curators and management when they were presented with results that conflicted with their own personal views, and museum professionals continue to develop exhibitions using the same conventional models and approaches even when they were not

resonating with visitors. I wanted museums to move beyond what I observed as an, at times, inflexible culture and practice and be more relevant to broader communities and courageous enough to discard the 'self-evident discourses' of the sector (Foucault 1991, 76). I did not, however, want the research project to be about me. I always appreciated the opportunity to hear from visitors, learn if the work of museum professionals was connecting with audiences and enjoyed the insights and perspectives from the people who we were, I believed, funded to serve. I also accepted the inevitability that, at times, our work was unsuccessful and failed to connect with the interests and needs of visitors, and I welcomed this feedback to improve my practice and the influence and relevance of the museum. Although I had visited museums in a school group, museums were not frequently visited by my family when I was growing up—we did not fit the typical museum audience profile. However, as a young adult with a creative bent, I came to love museums, especially art galleries. Through this, I became passionate about the need for these institutions to be relevant to the broadest audience and accessible to all people who support them through their taxes, not simply the privileged.

I share this with the reader to declare my positionality and to acknowledge and be reflexive about my role and values. My insider knowledge of the practice, policies and culture of museums has allowed me unprecedented access to the machinery of museums. Most researchers cannot access the depth and breadth of information that I have accessed, nor understand a project as comprehensively as I have understood the *Power of 1*. Other researchers' distance may be their strength, but it is also a shortcoming. Similarly, my close relationship with the content, institution and professionals could be perceived as both a strength and weakness.

As such, to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the largely qualitative research, a number of respected techniques that were developed by Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007, 18) were applied to this research:

- prolonged engagement to avoid preconceptions and develop a deep understanding of the setting, including interviewing a total of 140 visitors and 10 professionals over a 12-month period, in addition to working on the project at MoAD for 12 months beforehand
- triangulation of multiple sources and methods, including exit interviews, follow-up interviews with visitors months later, observation, professionals' interviews and document analysis involving the coding and quantifying of the qualitative data
- peer debriefing to uncover biases and assumptions, including attendance at an intensive graduate methodology program in 2015 at the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research at Syracuse University, where I presented my research design to leading researchers for analysis, critique and feedback
- member checks, in which museum professionals verified their own interview transcripts, and the follow-up visitor interviews allowed an opportunity to confirm or clarify interpretations from the original visitor exit interview data.

To further demonstrate the trustworthiness of the research, it should be noted that there were many unexpected findings, and these were often the most interesting. Neither I nor the *Power of 1* project team anticipated these unexpected responses, including:

- Visitors saw museums as sites for social responsibility and wanted their responses to be forwarded to decision-makers.
- Visitors held imagined conversations with other visitors, dead and alive.
- More than half of the interviewed visitors participated in the exhibition and left a comment or a contribution, even though the majority had never been to a participatory exhibition. Many of the museum professionals, including me, had expected only a minority of visitors to participate.
- Even though the interview questions did not ask about traditional museum experiences, visitors took the opportunity to share their views about the typical ways that museums present their exhibitions.
- Visitors felt they were participating in the exhibition, even when they did not leave a message.
- Visitors preferred the participatory exhibition over a traditional museum experience because participation 'made you think'. This was the most surprising finding, considering museums are typically viewed (or see themselves) as scholarly and authoritative institutions that value their educational remit and pride themselves on objectivity and rigour (Wilson 2011, 132–33). In this context, it is important that visitors stated that the experience of participation made them 'think', not learn.
- 'Education' was only the fourth most frequent (16.4%) reason given by visitors for the museum visit to the *Power of 1*. This finding supports the work of several scholars (S. Macdonald 2002; Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; Smith 2015) who indicated that education is not the only reason that people visit museums. This finding justifies the approach to this case study from a visitor's perspective, rather than a learning perspective.

4.4.2 Approval to conduct the research

Permission was gained by MoAD to access internal, unpublished interpretation and marketing materials, corporate strategies and policies, photographs and recordings of visitor contributions (i.e., digital and tangible), media coverage and other working documents relating to the museum and the exhibition's development and delivery (25 November 2014). Approval was gained from the Australian National University Human Research Ethics Committee on 19 December 2014 to conduct the research.

4.5 Research techniques

The case study drew on three new bodies of data consisting of semi-structured interviews with museum professionals, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with visitors at the time of their visit to the *Power of 1* and semi-structured longitudinal interviews with visitors several months after their visit to the exhibition. These were supported by other data, including observation,

analysis of internal unpublished documents and visitor usage statistics, visitor contributions and media coverage. The visitors interviewed for the *Power of 1* broadly reflected a typical museum audience profile. However, of the 140 people interviewed for this case study, a slightly higher proportion of females (57.1%) were interviewed. Interviewees were invited to participate in follow-up interviews, and the 11 visitors who replied to this request broadly reflected the original interview sample (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Visitors, who were interviewed for the Power of 1 case study as they left the exhibition, broadly reflected a typical museum audience profile. Follow-up interviewees also broadly reflected the original interview sample, although a higher proportion of people were from non–Anglo-Celtic Australian backgrounds.

Exit interviews	
Total number of interviewees	140
Women %	57%
Family group %	55%
People under 17 years %	28%
Adult visitors over 35 years %	46%
Adults with university degrees %	55%
Professional occupation %	43%
Anglo-celtic Australian backgrounds %	69%
Overseas tourists—frequency	10

Follow up interviews	
Total number of follow up interviews	11
Women—frequency	4
Professionals—frequency	4
Aged over 35 years—frequency	8
Non–Anglo-celtic Aust. backgrounds—frequency	6

4.5.1 Museum professionals' interviews

Semi-structured interviews with museum professionals (i.e., exhibition contractors, collaborators and staff involved in the development of the *Power of 1* exhibition) were conducted by the researcher at the interviewee's chosen venue (usually their workplace), by Skype or by phone. Ten interviews were conducted and each were around 40–50 minutes in duration. All museum professionals who were interviewed were first approached by email. An information sheet detailing the research, aims, ways in which the information from the interview was to be used, interview questions as well as a consent form were emailed to the interviewee prior to the interview. Museum professionals were asked up to 16 open-ended questions, including their role in the exhibition, understanding of museum visitors, history and aims of the exhibition, key messages they considered were embedded in the exhibition, expectations about participation in a museum environment, risks and the exhibition development and/or delivery process. These interviews were audio recorded (with permission) and transcribed for analysis. A transcript of the interview was provided to the staff member for verification. The museum professionals were categorised as external contractors (i.e., exhibition and multimedia designers, fabricators, academics and tangible data visualisation designers), the museum director and museum staff (e.g., project managers, exhibition maintenance, education and visitor services).

Apart from the museum director, who has a highly visible public profile, I have chosen not to identify by name any of the MoAD staff members who were interviewed. The Canberra museum

sector is small and consists of committed, decent, energetic and experienced people, many of whom I would call my friends. I respect and like them. Some of the attitudes and values expressed by museum staff in the interviews illustrate the intrinsic cultural obstacles of museum practice, but these obstacles are problems of the sector and not of the individuals. The views expressed are acceptable to many within the museum sector and have been heard in the institutions for which I have worked. I do not wish to 'name and shame' these respected colleagues, but to learn from this case study experience, strengthen the sector and increase the likelihood of its democratisation. In total, eight hours and 49 minutes of audio from interviews with the museum professionals were recorded and transcribed. The museum professionals' interviews schedule and questionnaire can be found in Appendices A and B. The results are in Chapter 5.

4.5.2 Visitor exit interviews

Visitor interviews, including a questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions, were conducted on-site at MoAD at Old Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, in January, February and September 2015. One hundred and forty people were initially interviewed in 63 separate interviews that were each around 10–20 minutes in duration. Structured questionnaires were used to capture variables, including age, educational attainment, occupation, gender, cultural background, reason for the museum visit and whether they had previously visited the museum. These responses were recorded in writing by the researcher. Interviewees were then asked to answer up to 16 open-ended questions that recorded visitor responses to the exhibition and participatory experiences. These included questions designed to capture the visitors' experiences in their own words, how the exhibition made them feel, whether they participated in the interactives (and if so, which ones), if they read other visitor contributions, their understanding of any messages and meanings in the exhibition and whether they thought the interactive style of the exhibition was effective.

Visitors were approached by the researcher to participate in the interviews as they left the *Power of 1* exhibition, and asked if they could spare some time to go through a questionnaire. Only five visitors declined to be interviewed and stated this was because they had insufficient time. All those interviewed were offered an information sheet about the research. Visitors were advised that their identity would not be disclosed in relation to the research, their responses were confidential and that material from the questionnaire would be anonymously cited. Some one-to-one interviews were undertaken, but many couples or groups (including families with children) opted to be interviewed together. Almost all interviews were conducted by the researcher, except for five visitor exit interviews that were undertaken by Laurajane Smith, the researcher's PhD supervisor, on the first day of interviews (6 January 2015) to help to assess the survey design. The occupation and ethnicity of the household's primary income earner were defined by the speaker, and are noted after each quotation used in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. The open-ended interviews were

audio recorded (with permission) and transcribed for analysis. In total, nine hours and 29 minutes of audio from the visitor interviews were recorded and transcribed. The visitor exit interviews schedule and questionnaire can be found in Appendices C and D, and the results are in Chapter 6.

There were some problems with the visitor interviews. For instance, occasionally interviews with family groups were cut short before all the questions were asked if a child needed attention. Some large groups who chose to be interviewed together became quite animated, and occasionally some individuals dominated the interview, resulting in questions that were not answered by all interviewees. Further, questions 4, 5 and 6 were follow-up questions to question 3, 'Did you participate in any of the interactives?' Over the course of the fieldwork, these questions were mostly not asked. There were several reasons for this, including they were not asked of non-participants, they were on occasion overlooked by the researcher, they felt somewhat gratuitous and sometimes visitors wanted to keep the interview brief and move to the next exhibit or finish their visit. As a result, the frequencies and percentages cannot be relied upon because of the smaller sample sizes for these three questions. However, the comments from visitors who did answer these questions were often insightful and pertinent to the study. These comments are included in Chapter 6. Further, most participants had not heard of the exhibition prior to their visit to the *Power of 1* and had little awareness or expectations with which to frame their visit. Therefore, the high frequency of 'Did not ask', noted in question 1 (see Chapter 6), was because many of the visitors interviewed for the study were invited to see the exhibition by the researcher. The lack of signage, external marketing and on-site promotion of the *Power of 1* exhibition (see Chapter 3) resulted in many visitors needing encouragement to enter the exhibition. The researcher typically asked, 'Have you seen the *Power of 1* exhibition?' This question attracted visitors' attention to the exhibition and away from the closely situated historic House of Representatives Chamber. The researcher did not ask question 1 when visitors were encouraged to attend the exhibition. Further, it is acknowledged that the interview technique itself may have influenced respondents' recall of the exhibition details.

4.5.3 Follow-up visitor interviews

During the exit interviews with visitors in early 2015, visitors were invited to participate in follow-up interviews. Sixteen visitors agreed to provide their contact details to the researcher so that they could be contacted some months later by phone for a second interview. In late July to early August 2015, the visitors were contacted for a follow-up interview that was up to seven months after the original interview. Of the 16 who had agreed to participate, 11 visitors replied and agreed to schedule an interview in July or August 2015. These longitudinal interviews provided an opportunity to speak again with the visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition. On this occasion, there was more time available and fewer distractions (with only one interviewee) than at the exit interview. As a result, follow-up questions were asked that sought greater insight or clarification about the visitors' earlier comments in the exit interviews. Some of the findings that emerged included

perceptions of traditional museum experiences, conversations with imagined communities and the potential value, from a visitor's perspective, of museum participation (see Chapter 6). Up to eight questions were asked in the follow-up interviews to explore the visitors' memories of the exhibition, perceptions of participation, traditional museum experiences, Australian democracy and politics and museums as sites for democratic renewal. The follow-up visitor interviews each lasted an average of 30 minutes and were audio recorded (with permission) and transcribed for analysis. In total, seven hours and 14 minutes of audio from the follow-up interviews with visitors were recorded and transcribed. The follow-up visitor interviews schedule and questionnaire can be found at Appendices E and F. The results are in Chapter 7.

4.5.4 Other data

Inspired by Dvora Yanow's (1998, 2006) work on the meanings that can be found in built spaces, an ethnographic observation of the *Power of 1* exhibition was conducted on 21 July 2015 in an attempt to appreciate some of the language in the built space's architecture and to create a textual narrative of what visitors may view in the *Power of 1*. Observation in a more technical form had formed part of the original research design (e.g., tracking visitor paths and dwell times at different interactives). However, after spending time in the gallery, which had multiple small rooms, it was apparent this approach would not work because of the layout of the exhibition and low visitation numbers. The visitors were very aware that they were being watched and appeared uncomfortable, and the researcher felt intrusive towards their visit. A more successful technique that was used by the researcher was ethnographic observation, in which the researcher took discrete jottings and was viewed by visitors as another visitor in the exhibition space. Museum management and staff were advised of and provided permission for this observation activity, which took place on 16 July 2015. The observation produced some interesting data about exhibition maintenance, how visitors engage when visitation is very low (and the exhibition space is empty) and the visibility of the exhibition. A report of the observations is provided in Appendix G.

Other data made available for the case study included MoAD's unpublished internal documents (including corporate documents, exhibition planning material, research reports, correspondence and visitor usage data and statistics), visitor contributions (i.e., digital and tangible) and related media coverage.

4.5.5 Data analysis and interpretation

The work of Sharon Macdonald (2005), grounded theory (Glaser 1992), content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) and discourse analysis (Foucault 1990; Wedeen 2008) informed the analysis of interview data from visitors and museum professionals. Informal but intelligent critical thinking was used to analyse, categorise and interpret the bodies of data from the interviews, questionnaires,

visitor contributions and corporate documents. For instance, the interview content was carefully and systematically analysed by transcribing each interview and then reviewing the data multiple times to observe and identify ideas, themes and concepts that emerged from the data. The qualitative data analysis and research computer program ATLAS.ti was used to manage the body of data, including texts and images. In the first instance, individual responses from the visitor's exit and follow-up interviews were allocated unique codes that related to the interview questions, participatory activity, affective reflections, exhibition messages and visitor attributes. This enabled the researcher to structure the data, become familiar with the responses and identify patterns and themes in the answers. The first coding phase also involved the categorisation of responses according to the findings of the literature review and related research and the deductive layering of existing theories to the data. Following this coding, a process of review, interpretation and categorisation of the data was undertaken to allow themes to inductively emerge and to become familiar with the interviewees' responses. In this analysis, issues among interviewees started to emerge relating to current affairs, engagement with politics and democracy, perceptions of museum experiences and reflections on the participatory exhibition. Indeed, having conducted the interviews and then closely analysing the data on multiple occasions I could—and still can—picture the faces of the people I interviewed when I read through the quotations. As more data became available from the follow-up interviews or as new themes appeared following further analysis, the dataset was again reviewed and additional interpretation and coding was undertaken to identify new themes, ideas and concepts. A similar process of analysis was followed for the museum professionals' interviews. This consisted of coding in the first instance and according to the interview questions and anticipated themes, followed by re-reading and a deeper analysis of the responses from across the group of interviewees to identify shared themes and new insights. This largely inductive approach was undertaken to enable visitors and professionals to use their own words to make meaning from the experience of participation. This allowed the researcher to understand, access, analyse, interpret and compare the interview data from the visitors and museum professionals, contextualise them to other datasets (such as visitor contributions and corporate documents) and observe and interpret themes. It also produced surprising discoveries. For instance, after careful and repeated reading it was observed that visitors regularly used the term 'just' to precede descriptions of traditional museum experiences. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. All elements were carefully coded and categorised, and a total of 264 individual codes were created from the three datasets.

As noted, although the research methodology was primarily qualitative, a mixed-method approach was also used where appropriate. For instance, aspects of quantitative research and a systematic and consistent approach were used as often possible during the data analysis, interpretation and presentation. To capture demographic details, data were collected from the visitors' questionnaires

and then statistically analysed in the SPSS software package. The codes that were defined during the critical analysis of the interview data using ATLAS.ti were also imported into SPSS, along with demographic information and the answers to the closed survey questions. In this way, the statistical analysis uncovered trends and provided distance through which to view the data and test assumptions. However, this does not suggest that the results were quantitative or broadly generalisable.

4.5.6 Definition of terms

Visitor versus audience: neither terms are entirely appropriate and suggest a 'receiving' and passive role. While both words were applied in the research, the term visitor was predominantly used.

Participation versus interactive: after interviewing visitors, it was clear that the term 'participation' was less well understood than 'interactive'. Therefore, the term 'interactive' was used when asking visitors about the activities in the exhibition that invited a response or comment.

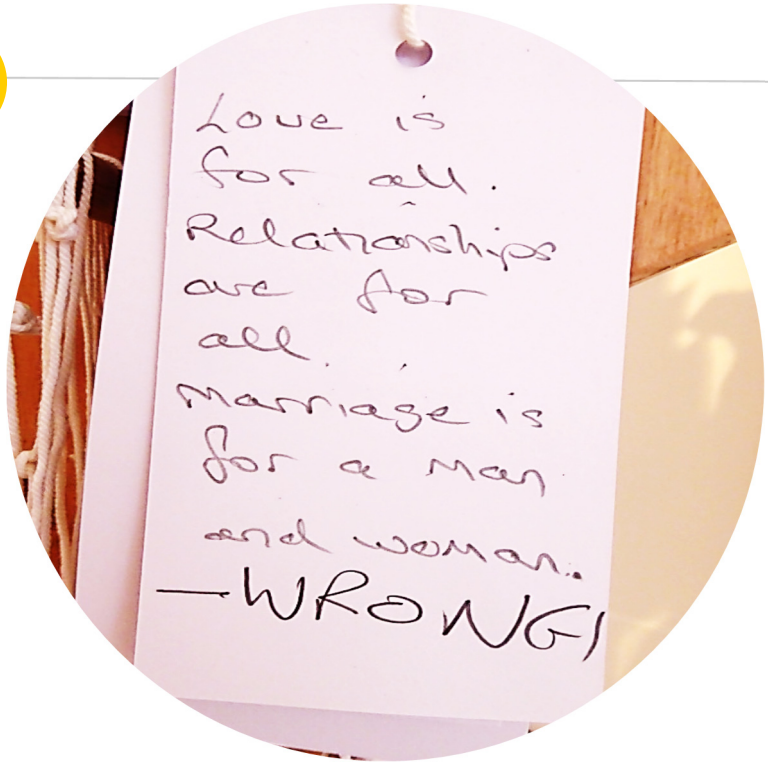
Tangible versus digital: the term 'tangible' was used to describe handwritten participatory activities, such as the graffiti wall, message tree and secret ballot. (I am not yet convinced that analogue is a well-known term to represent 'tangible'.) 'Digital' was used to describe online or electronic participatory interactives, such as the iPods, iPads and Commodore64 keyboard.

Participant versus non-participant: visitors participated even when they did not leave a response or comment. For example, they helped other members of the group craft a message or they read other visitors' messages. This classification was used at the beginning of the project but became misleading and inaccurate. I admit I have not found a better term, and have simply defined how the term is used and how it could be improved.

4.6 Conclusion

The research methodology and design used for the *Power of 1* case study sought to recognise the agency and active meaning-making of museum visitors. After exploring the history, theory and practice of participation (see Chapter 2), a more layered and complex research question emerged to respond to the power imbalances between museums and their visitors and acknowledge the multiple failed attempts to democratise the sector since the nineteenth century. Qualitative research was the most suited methodology, and drew on three new bodies of data, including semi-structured interviews with museum professionals, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with visitors at the time of their visit to the *Power of 1* and semi-structured longitudinal interviews with visitors several months after their visit to the exhibition. The qualitative research was supported by mixed-method and disciplinary approaches as well as other data, including observation and document

analysis. Extensive and intelligent critical analysis of all data sources allowed visitors to use their own words to make meaning from the experiences of participation, rather than impose existing theories. As the researcher, I acknowledged my positionality and the strengths and weaknesses it brought to the case study, such as unprecedented insider access that potentially undermined researcher distance. This situation was carefully mitigated by applying a number of respected techniques to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the data and analysis. This methodology produced original and unexpected results about the new museum trend of participation, including perceptions of traditional museum experiences and imagined conversations with real and imagined communities, dead and alive. These results are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.


Love is
for all.
Relationships
are for
all.
Marriage is
for a man
and woman.
—WRONG!

B

RESULTS

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS PART A

Museum professionals' interviews

5.1 Introduction

Interviews were conducted with 10 professionals associated with the development and delivery of the *Power of 1* exhibition after it had opened to the public to examine how museum practice relates to participatory visitor experiences and how it extends, supports, challenges or hinders participation. Has museum culture and practice facilitated or obstructed attempts to democratise since participatory experiences were introduced? The literature review demonstrated a common discourse in museums, including MoAD, of being focused on the visitor. However, it also showed the covert ways that museum professionals resisted cultural change that would open up their practice and share power with visitors (Sandell 2003; Duncan 2005). The review showed that professionals underestimated the abilities and active meaning-making of visitors by incorrectly perceiving visitors as passive receivers (Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1992; Tchen 1992; Sandell 1998; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2000; Sandell 2007; Carpentier 2011; Smith 2015), and there was a gap between the curatorial assumptions of what visitors will do in an exhibition and the actual visitor responses that take place (Lavine 1992). Indeed, one of the major issues in audience research is that museum professionals and academics assume that they know what visitors do during, and take away from, a museum visit. The museum professionals' interviews were an opportunity to test these assumptions and explore 'what happens in the space between what museums say they do and what they do without saying' (Duncan 2005, 4).

5.2 Roles during exhibition development and at the time of interview

Following the museum director's abandonment of the curatorial team's original exhibition concept of an object-based exhibition about the history of 18-year-olds' right to vote, the team that was established to develop the *Power of 1* exhibition took an unconventional approach. For example, many of the people involved in the development of the exhibition were external contractors or 'partners' (typically unpaid collaborators), including theatrical set designers (rather than the more conventional museum exhibition designer), multimedia producers and academics, many of whom had very little or no experience working with museums, and who brought new perspectives to the project. Internally, MoAD's museum director, Daryl Karp, came from a film and television sector

background and was the project champion who approved the direction and approach. Other team members had extensive museum experience. I was the 'executive producer' (often referred to by the museum director as the 'curator') and conceived the exhibition's concept and direction, including the participatory philosophy and activities. There was also an experienced museum senior project manager (and former curator) who coordinated the contractual, financial and other administrative aspects. A tight timeframe of less than one year for the exhibition's development was determined early in the process, in part because of a gap in the museum's schedule, and also to achieve a 'quick win' for the newly appointed museum director who had come from the media sector and wanted to try new, faster and more engaging approaches. This timeline shaped some of the decisions that followed, such as not using any collection items for the exhibition, which meant that curatorial and collection staff had minimal involvement in the project. A team of senior museum staff were involved in early brainstorming of the concept, received regular fortnightly updates about the project and offered occasional advice. Once the exhibition progressed to installation and delivery, a range of museum staff became more involved, including visitor services, exhibition maintenance, IT and media services and education staff. Representatives from many of these groups were interviewed for this case study and were categorised as external contractors (i.e., exhibition and multimedia designers, fabricators, academics and tangible data visualisation designers), the museum director and museum staff (e.g., project managers, exhibition maintenance, education and visitor services). Apart from the museum director, who has a high public profile, I have chosen not to identify by name any MoAD staff members who were interviewed for this project. The Canberra museum sector is small and comprises committed, decent, energetic and experienced people, many of whom I would call my friends. I respect and like them. Some of the attitudes and values expressed by museum staff in the interviews illustrate the intrinsic cultural obstacles of museum practice, but they are problems of the sector and not of the individuals. The views expressed have been heard in many of the institutions for which I have worked and would be acceptable to many within the sector. I do not wish to 'name and shame' these respected colleagues, but to learn from this case study experience, strengthen the sector and increase the likelihood of its democratisation.

I invited interviewees to describe their roles in the project and drew on their words to outline their contribution to the project and note whether they continued to play a role in the exhibition at the time of the interview. In my experience, roles and titles are enthusiastically defended in museums—if they hold authority and influence—or derided if they are perceived to have less serious value. Although the museum director called me 'curator' of the *Power of 1* project, I felt uneasy with this title knowing how provocative it would be for an 'audience engagement' professional to make such a transition.

The external contractors and partners and their roles in the *Power of 1* included:

- M1: Michela Ledwidge, co-owner of MOD Productions, undertook the exhibition's design and build, including the interactive (digital/technical) experience. At the time of the interview, MOD had completed the *Power of 1* contract, but Michela was scheduled to make an appearance as a live performer at an evening museum event.
- M2: Mish Sparks, co-owner MOD Productions, was the producer of interactives, installations and experiences and responsible for the 'wrangling' of suppliers (including set designers, fabricators and sign-makers) to deliver the exhibition. Mish did not have an ongoing official role or formal relationship with MoAD, but answered occasional questions from the museum staff.
- M3: Geoff Hinchcliffe, (at the time of the research) University of Canberra, was a consultant for the tangible data visualisation installation. Since *Power of 1* opened he had light involvement in terms of promoting the exhibition and suggesting to colleagues and friends to go 'check it out'.
- M4: Mitchell Whitelaw, (at the time of the research) University of Canberra, was engaged to consider and propose ideas around representing the data. Since the exhibition opened, Mitchell had not had other roles related to the exhibit, but had been to a couple of the opening events.
- M6: Mark Evans, IGPA, University of Canberra, co-designed the questionnaire for the survey that underpinned the exhibition and brought together experts to understand attitudes towards democracy. Mark has an ongoing role with MoAD in supporting the development of data to underpin its exhibitions, including developing a survey about trust for a '*Power of 1* 'Mark II' (M5) exhibition.

The museum director and her role in the *Power of 1* included:

- M5: Daryl Karp worked closely with the researcher (then MoAD's community engagement manager) to develop an exhibition that would be contemporary, data-focused and allow people to be engaged in the conversation. At the time of the interview, given that the 'curator' (MoAD's community engagement manager) was no longer working at MoAD, the museum director's primary role with the exhibition was to keep the conversation alive and examine what might be introduced next.

The museum staff (exhibition development) and their role in the *Power of 1* exhibition included:

- M7: project manager who formulated the budget, sought and managed appropriate contractors, dealt with procurement processes and ensured that the team was on track and communicating effectively and that contractors were fulfilling their obligations. The project manager moved to a new role in an interstate museum three months prior to the exhibition opening.

The museum staff (exhibition delivery and operations), who were interviewed 10 months after the exhibition opened, and their roles in the *Power of 1* exhibition included:

- M8: senior manager of learning and visitor services had, as part of the senior management team, some initial involvement in the exhibition's development and then provided input on what value could be added to the experience.

- M9: project manager, who was engaged when the exhibition was three-quarters complete, and then assisted with ongoing project management and exhibition maintenance.
- M10: assisted the public to engage with the exhibition in the few months after it opened when the exhibition galleries were staffed.

5.3 Background

5.3.1 History of the exhibition

Interviewees were asked about their understanding of the history of the *Power of 1* exhibition—that is, what led to the decision to mount the exhibition—to determine whether there was a shared understanding among the team regarding the exhibition's genesis. All but one museum professional, including external contractors and staff, identified that a key influence in undertaking the exhibition was the desire to find a new approach to developing exhibitions through organisational collaboration and audience engagement using participatory approaches. Museum professionals stated that they wanted 'to do something that was more engaging' (M1), a 'two-way [approach], not just telling visitors "this is how it is", but engaging … visitors and the wider community in a discussion around these levels of satisfaction' with our democracy (M2), to be 'radically participatory in the sense of an exhibition which was … democratic in its operation' (M4). This almost universal desire showed that the project was underpinned by a shared understanding of a new approach to museum interpretation.

The catalyst for this different approach was the new museum director. M6 noted that the 'change of leadership' led to a 'view that maybe the [existing MoAD] exhibitions were starting to look a little bit dated in some ways, and there was a need for an exhibition that would capture the public imagination'. The museum director explained that MoAD was in a position to take greater risks than some of the larger, established and more popular national institutions, stating that 'it didn't actually matter if we didn't get half a million people coming to it … We could say, "We *may* get the numbers. Let's try something new. Who knows?"' (M5).

The relatively new relationship with IGPA (previously named ANZSOG), which led to the national baseline survey of Australians' attitudes towards democracy that informed the exhibition, was also viewed by M3 as a key reason for the project. It was more likely for internal staff to recall the original challenge of commemorating the 40th anniversary of young people's right to vote than external contractors, indicating, 'We originally came up with the idea of *From Activism to Apathy* that proved to be inaccurate as a framework. It was just part of the creative process of working with highly creative people that led to this particular approach and exhibition' (M5). M7 also noted that the original, conventional object-based proposal did not proceed:

> M7: I think it was what we used to call a 'director's special' (laughs). We had a director who had come up with this idea that was built around the 40th anniversary of the decision to give 18 year olds the vote … and then I think it had just developed after a great many discussions about what was viable and whether that simple concept of giving the 18-year old the vote didn't really have a lot of legs. We didn't have a lot of objects to give that concept any real guts, so I think it just kept developing. There was lots of research that happened around it, from a curatorial point of view, but nothing really seemed to stick. And then, you—Rachael—came up with a plan, and the director went with that plan and after lots and lots more discussion it started to evolve and I think it became much less of a curatorial project and much more of a participatory, you know, audience engagement project.

Note the way that humour was used to gain distance from the decision to mount the exhibition in the phrase 'director's special', as well as the description of the exhibition as being more about 'audience engagement' than being 'curatorial'. This is one of the first examples of a staff member trying to distance herself from the experimental, unconventional and audience-centred approach to the exhibition, suggesting there was an opposition between the curatorial work and the work of audience engagement or participation.

The authority and role of the curators at MoAD were deeply respected by most staff. The idea that 'audience engagement' could be a primary goal of an exhibition that was led by a non-curator may have been threatening to staff who were committed to conventional approaches to interpretation and exhibition development. MoAD's corporate documents espouse a commitment to engaging visitors; therefore, the claim that audience engagement was outside the scope of curatorial work and practice is notable. M7's statement could be an example of how unconventional approaches to activate visitor agency can be dismissed by museum professionals as 'dumbing down' (Fleming 2014), and it exposes how museum professionals might resist cultural change in covert ways (Sandell 2003; Duncan 2005).

5.3.2 Aims of the exhibition

Interviewees were asked about their understanding of the aims of the exhibition. Similar to the discussion of the history of the project, all interviewees referred to the relationship between democracy and the importance for citizens to have their say through a conversation with the museum. External partners to the project demonstrated an appreciation of the role of the citizen's voice in democracy and how a museum exhibition might try to translate or activate that voice using new approaches to museum experiences that are led by visitors and are participatory and entertaining. In defining what that new and participatory approach would be, several interviewees provided negative portrayals of what could be described as traditional museum experiences. M2 was enthusiastic that the *Power of 1* was 'the opposite' of 'a pedagogical kind of, you know, "You're here to learn" thing'. M9 reflected that the aim of the project was 'to do something different in the

building. To do something that was outside a general museum model of objects and labels and to do something participatory, and the research'.

As an expression of a new approach, the museum director spoke of the 'openness' of the project in 'bringing an unusual group together, using set designers and … it was a total openness from the curator, you know, and all of us, to actually go to say, "We don't have to make this a conventional experience. Let's go as wide as we can with some of the elements"' (M5).

The ability of participatory experiences to spark a conversation was noted as another example of how the *Power of 1* differed from traditional museum experiences. It was fitting for the exhibition's topic to demonstrate citizen agency in Australian democracy, 'to basically remind and celebrate that democracy is made up of individuals putting in their voice, and using the experience on-site and the media and the marketing around it as a starting point for discussion about how well that's working or not' (M1). M10 suggested that the exhibition engaged 'people within the content, and having that conversation between content and the viewer'. The exhibition could 'glean some of their [the public's] views and also give an opportunity to share views, you know, to hear what other people have said about democracy but also to participate in that conversation' (M3). The exhibition also had a serious purpose that was 'fundamentally about engaging the citizen in the exhibition and in discursive activity around the future of Australian democracy' (M6).

As well as engaging visitors in a conversation about Australian democracy, the museum director articulated multiple aims for the exhibition that arose from the exhibition and the partnerships that were formed with the institution:

> M5: What I hoped the exhibition would achieve was to do three things. The first was to position the museum as a generator and interpreter of contemporary data, which was embodied in the partnership with Canberra University; to have the exhibition as the first really proactive and big space where we were engaging in a conversation with our visitors around our core purpose of celebrating the spirit of Australian democracy, and the power of your voice within it; and then … 'to position yourself in the sea of data'. In a time where there's a lot of data going on, where do you fit in? And there's a fourth minor one from a museum perspective, which was to really build on partnerships and to capitalise on some of the nascent partnerships that we had that could drive some of those ideas.

There was a shared understanding of the aims of the *Power of 1* that included creating an engaging and entertaining participatory experience that invited citizens to participate in a conversation about Australian democracy and their role within it. Participatory activities were perceived to meet this remit of deeper engagement, citizen agency and the sparking of conversations in a format that traditional museum experiences could not. Specifically, for MoAD, it was an opportunity to forge relationships through which it could build a reputation as a contemporary and creative institution, including strong links to academia with which to generate original and relevant research in a way that was not otherwise possible through museum curatorial work. Note that the museum

professional interviewees expressed a somewhat negative portrayal of traditional museum experiences during their discussions of this 'different' (M9), 'unconventional' (M5) and participatory project's ambition, stating that traditional experiences were 'pedagogical' (M2), 'objects and labels' (M9), not 'open' and 'didactic' (M3) (rather than engaging the visitor in conversation). The museum professional interviewees continued that traditional museum experiences were less able to generate relevant research than an academic partner and tended not to value visitor agency and expertise. These views were subtly expressed, but there appeared to be some agreement about the shortcomings of traditional museum experiences. Many visitors shared these views of traditional museum experiences and these comments will be examined in the analysis of the visitor interviews (see Chapters 6 and 7) and the discussion (see Chapter 8).

5.3.3 Key messages

All interviewees were asked to identify the key messages they hoped visitors would take from the exhibition. Not surprisingly, using various frames, the agency of citizens to have their say was mentioned by all interviewees. When developing the exhibition, the 'big idea' (Serrell 2015) was defined as, 'You have a voice. It counts. (It always has.) Have your say and be heard'. This was printed in large text within the exhibition. The museum director voiced this understanding of visitor agency and the role of the citizen in society when she said, 'There is a role of the citizen in civic participation, and democracy is not just about voting, it is actually about being part of a civic civil society' (M5). External museum partners with a strong commitment to the philosophy of participation and agency enthusiastically articulated the messages of the exhibition. M2 wanted visitors to:

> M2: Walk away with more of a sense of agency … I hope that visitors take away key messages that you do have a voice, you're an active participant in our society, community, democracy, system. That, although it may be hard sometimes, people are listening in some ways. The fact that the museum itself, which is a department of government, is inviting people to have a two-way conversation, I hope that comes across as a message as well.

M1 hoped that the exhibition would motivate people 'to participate in the democratic process and not just be apathetic and sort of complain from the sidelines, and have an understanding that not everyone participates in the same way, and there's historical reasons for that'.

Two external museum partners identified new ways of creating museum experiences as another key message. M4 acknowledged that people were responding to the 'generational ideas and … cues' that were 'presented in that beautiful way'. The following response from M3 articulated that traditional approaches to museum interpretation were 'broadcast' and 'one-way', representing what appears to be shared agreement about the shortcomings of conventional approaches:

> M3: What's really novel about that exhibition is that you tend to see exhibitions in, I guess, in a broadcast way, you know, you're going … to observe an exhibition … the communication is all one-way. Whereas what's novel about that exhibit is that it really does not present in that light, I don't think. You know, there's elements of broadcast, sure, in the exhibition and it is wonderful and playful and fun, but it's very much there for you to continue to engage and to share your views.

M6, as an academic whose research focus is democracy and politics, provided a highly detailed and layered account for the potential messages of the exhibition, including an appreciation of Australia's democratic history, the obligations of politicians to re-engage with citizens and for citizens to play a role in democratic renewal.

Museum staff identified key messages that were similar to those defined by external partners and the museum director about the changing nature of Australian democracy and the opportunity for citizens to have a voice:

> M7: I think, in the end, that concept that 'you have a voice' did come through really quite clearly—regardless of age or politics or direction—that people have, had a voice and how they use that changed, and that was quite clear as well. And that was, I think, a really positive message though, that we were still using those voices no matter what age or what generation we were.

Note that, compared with most of the external partners, some of the language that was used by the museum staff was slightly more prescriptive about how visitors should respond (although M1 had a very clear idea that people should do more than 'complain from the sidelines'). The key messages articulated by the staff were no less sound, thoughtful and relevant than those of the external contractors. However, I wonder whether some of these answers reflected broader attitudes towards visitors and advocated for the traditional role of museums in educating visitors. For example:

> M8: I think one is that they can discuss, debate, critically analyse their democracy. That there's nothing wrong with that. But also they can contribute, and that they have the power to shape their democracy as well. *That they have to feel, like, they have to realise that they do have that power.*
>
> M9: I would like them to reflect on … that Australian democracy is a dry word and a dry subject matter, but that it is quite unique, that it is an undervalued … undervalued? Maybe not as highly valued as it should be in the way that it influences your general lives. I know when I started working here [at MoAD], the first time I went to vote after I'd started working here, I was like, 'Right! Let me go do my democratic duty' because yeah, otherwise it becomes a very negative. I think it would be nice to focus on … *if people more focused on the positives of democracy rather than the negatives. It's all about politicians.* Because if you separate democracy from politics and politicians and what that actually means, yeah.

There was broad agreement among the interviewees of the key messages from the *Power of 1* exhibition. External contractors and the museum director tended to approach their answers from the perspective of empowering the visitor or citizen, and they were positive about how the participatory approach could contribute to that outcome and redress the inadequacies of the

traditional approach to museum experiences. In contrast, some museum professionals shared firm views of how visitors should respond to and engage with the exhibition, its content and the participatory activities. The take away messages that the museum visitors identified will be examined in Chapters 6 and 7. However, it is interesting to note the degree to which the curatorial staff took a proprietorial position to visitors and articulated fixed views regarding the messages that visitors should take away from the exhibition (see Chapter 8). This demonstrated some of the intrinsic attitudes among professionals that still exist in museums and potentially constrain audience engagement and limit institutional relevance. In this way, the views expressed show how museum professionals tend to privilege supply over demand and discount visitor agency and authority (Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; Mason 2006; Smith 2015).

5.4 Visitor profiles

Interviewees were asked if they knew the demographics of visitors to MoAD and whether the *Power of 1* exhibition was designed to change the visitor profile to establish whether there was a shared understanding of who the exhibition was developed for. In summary, tourists, retirees, families and school children were considered the main audiences. As expected, all participants answered the question thoughtfully and with varying levels of expertise, but there were differences in how the question was answered by MoAD staff compared with external partners. The museum director (M5) stated that she hoped the demographic profile of MoAD visitors (who were likely to be older) would change, stating that the 'early indications' showed promising signs.

Interviewees were also asked whether particular museum visitors were more likely to participate. Most of the interviewed museum staff tended to believe that the age of the visitor was likely to determine whether they participated and that the activity needed to be simple for visitors to understand. Some museum staff shaped their answers based on their personal preferences, acknowledging that they would not personally participate in an exhibition (M7 and M9). These interviewees agreed with the museum director that visitors under the age of 30 would be more likely to participate and be attracted to a participatory exhibition. M8 suggested that 'educated, middle-class, Anglo' visitors would be more likely to participate, noting that 'safe' and 'accessible' experiences would need to be introduced to attract the 'first and second generation of new Australians'. However, staff member M10, who had spent time assisting visitors in the *Power of 1* exhibition and had first-hand knowledge of the visitors, observed that older visitors were more likely to participate, stating that they had 'already formulated their opinions and are confident in delivering those opinions, because they're not afraid of the consequences'. M7 had previous experience in developing participatory exhibitions and advised that many visitors would not participate unless their contributions were visible in the exhibition:

> M7: It's always difficult with participatory exhibitions. It's about making it as simple a thing as possible to participate. You know, like there's an end product that they can actually see, that they can actually feel and see, and see that it's added to the sum total … that it appears somewhere in that exhibition. That's the challenge with these kinds of things.

In contrast, the external project partners urged caution in generalising about the visitors who would be likely to participate because that could give way to outdated gender and age stereotypes. M4 observed that museums have been known to oversimplify the requirements to attract younger audiences, suggesting that 'museums often go, or they seem to say, "Well, we want a younger audience so the way to do that is with technology. Let's throw technology at them and then they'll come"'. This external perspective of museum practice as uninformed and oversimplified is revealing. Other external partners argued that good design and attitude could influence the success of an interactive experience, rather than demographics. For example, M1 stated, 'I don't know if [a demographic profile of people who participate is] helpful, because these things are moving and digital experience is becoming mainstream for a lot of people. And also just, you know, you could argue that it's more the success of the experience design for a particular audience that determines that as opposed to, "Oh, people just won't do this in general"'. M2 and M4 believed that the likelihood of participating related to people's attitudes and 'willingness to have a go' (M2). One of the external academic contractors also offered some suggestions as to who might be most likely to participate, indicating that education levels and the widespread use of technology could play a role:

> M6: I think it depends on the modes of interaction, so I think if you're talking about picking up a pen, then that's going to encourage participation from educated people. However, with the use of the new technologies, I think that participation would be more open because obviously people are used to using now, smart phones and iPads etc., and certainly the demographic for accessing those types of technology has increased in Australia.

One interesting comment was made by M2, whose commitment to visitor agency and participation included a wholehearted respect for any visitor's contribution to show that the process of participation is as important as the product. I note my own (RC) contribution to the conversation, which showed that I did not value the 'silly comments' as much as the 'meaningful things', and that some of my own attitudes need to be reflected upon and reconsidered to improve my practice:

> M2: We see from our end, the back end, where we see the content coming through. Lots of young people, kids, are engaging with it, so that's great.
>
> *RC: Yeah, it is amazing. When the topic is democracy, that's quite an extraordinary outcome, I think, to have kids participate. I mean, sometimes they say silly things but sometimes they say quite heartfelt, meaningful things. I think that's amazing.*
> M2: Yeah, and with the silly things, like, we notice that too, I think that that is part of the process of them being able to have agency and do things in a space, and even if it is something stupid, like, 'wawwawa' or whatever, it doesn't matter. They're able to do that, which is something you normally can't do in a cultural institution, particularly talking about a serious topic like democracy. So it's kind of like, look, the outcome, the content isn't that important but I believe a work like this, *the process is as important as the product.*

I was not alone in casting judgements about visitors' contributions. Staff member M9 suggested that young people, with their experience of social media, were 'more inclined' to participate, 'which is fine if we can channel it into something that is, you know, authentic' [a term used by M9 during the interview to represent serious contributions that are on topic, but could also be a tool to close debate, such as 'safe']. M9 contradicted her own observation when she observed examples of older visitors participating in the exhibition during maintenance and monitoring of the contributions, stating:

> M9: Like the guy who said [in an audio recording that had been removed from the Boomers Room because it breached MoAD's guidelines on terms of use] that homosexuals are wicked had a very old voice (laughs), so he was very happy to participate. And I did see on those cards, lots of old lady writing, lots of comments, which make you know that they are of a certain age.

The museum director held a more open view of participation than the staff, noting that it was possible to be a participant as an observer. It will be necessary to change some of the sector's language around participation to better reflect the different styles of participation that respect the multiple ways that visitors can participate in an exhibition:

> M5: I think that the exhibition has been really cleverly designed to capture the broadest range of participation. So if your participation is a passive observer, you could stand back and watch what others are doing. If you're somebody who likes to write, you can write. If you want to have a selfie, you can have a selfie, and if you want to actually write in response to the secret ballot or the 'I just want to say'. So I think it tailors its approach to meet the needs of everyone. I think probably the area we didn't fully recognise was the desire for very young people, under voting age, to really be part of the conversation. And we're actually seeing a lot of very young people, even, dare I say it, sticking their head under the handwritten camera to have a selfie taken in that space.

Almost all interviewees—both museum staff and external partners—acknowledged that they wanted to know more about who participates and were intrigued to know more about the insights gained from this research as to who might be willing to participate. However, the external contractors and partners—who come from commercial perspectives, for which there is arguably less room for failure than museums, or from academic perspectives, in which there is greater acceptance of not always having the answers—offered a more complex and layered understanding of who might participate that reflected their personal philosophies regarding visitor or user agency. M3 admitted to not knowing who participated but was interested in how analogue and digital forms compared, adding, 'I guess ultimately people who do, who respond to the subject matter, you know, who have a view on democracy. I guess that would be the majority of people who bother to turn up'.

There was general acceptance that little was known about participation in museums; however museum staff presented firm views about who, why and how people will (or will not) participate in an exhibition. Some staff, including me, shared value judgements about the quality of visitor

participation in a museum experience. These expectations will be compared with the visitor findings in Chapters 6 and 7, and in the discussion in Chapter 8. The reliance of museum staff on personal, anecdotal and subjective views rather than audience research findings could contribute to the disjuncture between what curators think visitors will do and what they actually do (Lavine 1992; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012). Rather than openly acknowledging that they may not have all the answers, the lack of accurate knowledge among museum staff about visitors could constrain attempts to introduce unconventional museum experiences that may potentially attract more diverse audiences and give visitors agency. External partners were more cautious about relying on stereotypes to inform their practice and valued the importance of good and informed design over clichés. The perspective of respecting the process of participation and not just the product was introduced by M2 and shaped how participation was valued in this study. All interviewees indicated that they would like to know more about the audience responses to and engagement with participation, signalling the need for research such as this case study to improve museum practice.

5.5 Participation

5.5.1 What does participation in a museum environment mean to you?

All interviewees were asked to define museum participation. Most chose to use a very broad characterisation, perhaps in part because three months had passed since the *Power of 1* exhibition had opened and they had observed the ways in which visitors had participated. In museums, participation is typically measured by the number of contributions left by visitors. While this definition was shared by some interviewees, a broader and more fluid characterisation also emerged. Staff members were most likely to be more conservative and prescriptive in their definitions of participation. For instance, M7 reasserted her view that visitors needed to have an opportunity to physically contribute to an exhibition, and 'that somehow what they've added to it is a physical thing that they can see, that they can see a result from being a part of that'. M7 expressed some reservations about participation and used humour to express her concern about the additional resources required to support participatory experiences, resulting in 'lots of hard work as a curator (laughs)'. In her response, M7 expressed a concern that visitor participation may lack meaning, gravitas or significance compared with curated exhibitions when she stated that visitor contributions needed to 'mean something … and, you know, sort of curatorially, that's really hard to achieve'. Additional concerns were expressed by staff member M8, who acknowledged her use of clichés to describe participatory experiences in museums as 'a safe place to experience, to think about, to discuss, debate, to … take some sort of action in relation to an unsafe … issue that you wouldn't normally feel comfortable in doing'. M8 stated that 'you may not agree with the way they're sparked', which, while unclear, could demonstrate a lack of support for participatory

experiences, and added that there were benefits to having 'those ideas out there and then people can respond to them' (M8).

Some interviewees defined participation in the context of the shortcomings of traditional museum approaches. For instance, staff member M9 reflected on the way museums typically want visitors to 'do what we want them to do'. M9's ability to reflect on her practice and be open to broader and less prescriptive museum experiences shows how museum professionals can change their practice when exposed to unconventional approaches:

> M9: The more, not basic, but understood thing would be *you do something and you leave it*. You build something and you leave it. You make your mark on a wall or something like that, but I think that it's worth thinking outside that box and say, actually, if someone comes here and they write a review on our Facebook page, fantastic, you know? And *maybe we need to be happy that people return and do things a different way, rather than do what we want them to do, which is write on something and stick it on our board* or, you know?

The external museum partners were more likely to hold open and inclusive views of participation that contrasted with the typical museum's intention to control visitors' experiences. In contrast with the staff members' often prescriptive and constrained definitions, M2 framed her response as 'it doesn't mean participation is doing something that we want you to do. Participation for me is doing what you want to do. It's making your own choices within it'.

When compared with traditional and static museum experiences, external partner M6 expressed support for participation and its ability to diversify audiences and generate deeper engagement:

> M6: Well, in the context of this exhibition, it means immersing yourself in an exhibit and interacting with the exhibit and contributing to the experience itself. But not all exhibits are like that, of course. A lot of exhibits are *just*, you know, presented in a much more static way where it's not possible to interact with the exhibits apart from through your own imagination. So the difference, I think, in terms of this exhibit was there was a real intent, basically, to break down sort of traditional barriers of participation within a museum environment and encourage people to interact with the exhibit. And I think that that approach is likely to encourage wider participation.

M1 agreed that participation was superior to traditional museum experiences because of its 'active engagement beyond passive consumption of exhibits' and described an 'idealistic' interaction in museums as 'leaning into the experience'. Further, M1 criticised conventional museum interactives as '*just* sort of button-bashing or, you know, pressing a button to see whether it works'.

Extremely broad definitions were also offered, including 'anything' (M4 and M10) and 'anyone who walks into an exhibition' (M3). These open definitions of participation led to a discussion of scales or levels of engagement, including a 'high level [that] would be people who examine all the exhibits and participate through them in the way it's expected, you know? They actually do register their opinions and they use those tools to do so. And I think the highest level would be then continuing

that level of conversation and promotion, you know, sharing their views about democracy through their own channels, and also sharing their interest in the exhibit to other people' (M4). A scale of participation was also expressed by the museum director, who stated that 'for some people, participation is just standing back and observing. In an ideal world, however, it's the physical act of doing' (M5). This language of ladders and scale reflects Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation from Chapter 2.

The need for a broad and inclusive definition of participation that could extend beyond museum walls and activate visitor agency was agreed by almost all interviewees. Such a broad and democratic meaning to participation could help to achieve the oft-cited democratisation goals for the sector. It would minimise the domination and imbalanced power relations (Shapiro 2009) that occur when visitors' choices and options are limited and controlled by museum professionals. Concerns expressed by some staff members that participation could lack the meaning that curated experiences provide or could be 'unsafe' could be viewed as attempts to avoid conflict and resist change (D. F. Cameron 1971; Lynch and Alberti 2010). For instance, insisting that museums must be a 'safe place' (M8) could be another way for museum professionals to maintain control over the visitor experience, suggesting that conditions must be implemented by the museum to define what visitors are allowed to do. It also potentially shuts down debate, as few people would argue in favour of making museums 'unsafe'. Visitors' perceptions of participatory experiences and whether they were able to make meaning from, and felt safe in, the exhibitions will be examined in Chapter 6, as will visitors' perceptions of traditional museum experiences. I note that similar language, especially the word 'just', was used by both museum professionals and visitors. The continued portrayal of traditional museum experiences by both staff and external contractors as 'just' passive and static will be further explored in Chapter 8.

5.5.2 Previous experiences of participation

Interviewees were asked if they had been involved in any participatory experiences in a museum context. Most people had not been directly involved in creating and delivering experiences in which visitors could participate. The external contractors had little or no direct experiences, but many had attended exhibitions in other museums that invited participation, and two external contractors had developed interactive digital experiences for museums. The museum director had no experience of developing a participatory experience before the *Power of 1*. Museum staff member M7 had previous experience delivering participatory experiences in exhibitions, and she noted that such approaches to engage visitors were becoming more common in the sector:

> M7: I think, you know, most exhibitions are always tied into some kind of interactive or some kind of participatory … but I think the *Power of 1* was the first time I've been involved in an exhibition that was almost wholly focused on being a participatory

> experience. On, you know, using that participatory experience to actually build up data and research and all that sort of thing. So, you know, there was a much broader academic context behind it as well. Whereas I think, you know, nowadays we're always trying to find something that allows people to feel like they're a part of an exhibition, rather than simply being a consumer.

This demonstrates that participation is still a new concept to most people working in or with museums, and there is still much to be learned and researched in this area. The lack of experience puts into context the previous comments by interviewees about visitors who are likely to participate. It also shows that anecdotal accounts of how visitors are expected to respond to participatory experiences should be treated with caution, as there are simply not enough case studies with which to justify the anecdotal judgements. Further, the anecdotal accounts could indicate a reluctance to change rather than expertise about museum visitors.

5.5.3 Participating in a museum environment

Interviewees were asked if there was something different about participating in a museum environment. Nearly all responses suggested that there was something intangible about museums that made them different—they are trusted, authoritative and worthy sites of education with an aura or caché that gives them a sense of authenticity and tradition. Only one respondent, external contractor M1, asserted that the difference was tangible and related to museum content and collections. Staff member M10 did not think there was any difference. The museum director (M5) felt that 'an expectation of trust' was the key characteristic that distinguished museums from other environments that offered participatory experiences, and 'you're more open to ideas and how those ideas might be used'.

Most interviewees argued that the 'aura' (M4) associated with museums comes at a price and could 'encourage or discourage people from participating' (M4). Staff member M8 argued that it could generate 'too much respect' (especially in a historic building) and impede 'talking and discussing and having a go at something'. Museums' sense of tradition and importance was also noted by staff member M9, who advocated that museums should not be 'full of crap' like the internet and should be more discerning about visitor contributions, suggesting an intent to censor visitors' comments. However, during the interview with M9, in which I shared that visitors wanted their contributions to be forwarded to politicians, M9 conceded that numerous contributions from visitors were thoughtful and considered, adding that with this sense of tradition comes a responsibility that museums should honour visitors' contributions by engaging with them in a genuine way. This was a valuable reflection by the museum staff member and provided an insight into the potential role for museums as agents for change. It also acknowledged the ways that museums can avoid token participation by responding to visitors' contributions (Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1976; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2006) to meet their responsibilities to their communities:

> M9: There is something and maybe this is why we get such considered things [visitor comments and contributions] of who we are and where we are and that we are in a museum and that people think that it's going to go to the politicians (laughs) … *The internet's full of crap. YouTube is full of, you know, people falling off bikes and things like that. That's not what we're about. So, if you're participating here there is something more important about it, instantaneously, and we probably need to honour that by knowing where our things are going to go, to politicians.*

A traditional educational role for museums was endorsed by one external academic partner, who stated that 'if you're going to a museum then there's usually an intent, basically, to learn' (M6). The role of authoritative educator and researcher was more highly valued than the role of entertainer, according to staff member M7, who supported the inclusion of academic research in the *Power of 1*, which 'gave it an authenticity that you might not get in maybe just undertaking, you know, participating in a … maybe an arts program out in the square somewhere or something like that, where it's about … as much about entertainment as anything else'. According to external partner M2, who approached her answer from the visitor's perspective, the perceived incompatibility of education and entertainment misunderstood visitors' needs and wants:

> M2: A museum is a cultural learning institution. There is definitely an expectation that visitors go away with having learned something … worthy and important, and that's a fair point. But there is tension there, between doing something worthy and doing something fun. [T]ake signage, for example. There's a real pressure to include more signage … but, you know, from our experience people don't want the signage. They just want to do things, you know?

M2's observation exposed the disconnection between some museum practitioners' understanding of what visitors want and what visitors actually want (Lavine 1992; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012), illustrated the value of external perspectives and contributions to museum projects and provided an understanding of the less understood visitor perspective in a museum context. The trusted authority of museums is a defining attribute that must not be a barrier to attracting more inclusive and diverse audiences who want entertainment or just to 'do things' (M2). As staff member M9 admitted, the contributions made by visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition were given thought and consideration, and MoAD had a responsibility to imagine and create a purpose for those contributions beyond the walls of the museum. The visitors' views of participating in a museum environment will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.5.4 Is the *Power of 1* a participatory exhibition?

Interviewees were asked if they saw the *Power of 1* as a participatory exhibition, and most respondents agreed with this description. It is interesting that their answers revealed support or opposition to this unconventional approach, which shifts power from the curator and museum to the visitor. The external museum partners and museum director agreed that the exhibition was participatory, and in their answers, they viewed the exhibition as democratic in style and approach

because it did not tell visitors how to respond or contribute. Activating visitor choice was observed as a strength by external partners of the *Power of 1* because it would 'allow people to engage in a multitude of different ways … so even if they're not personally actively participating, they're passively participating but also witnessing the active participation other people are adding to the exhibition' (M2). M1 considered the *Power of 1* participatory because 'there's a range of ways in which the audience can engage, both through screen interactions but also with the built environment and physical objects in the space'. M1 hoped that audiences felt there was 'connectivity' between the content and participatory components, suggesting, 'It's not just a space full of buttons and things to play with, but they're actually all holistically joined. Technically as well, all the digital strands feeding into one whole action'. M6 stated that 'from the moment you walk through the door' the *Power of 1* is 'participatory because at every stage of the exhibition people are able to interact with the exhibit and to articulate their views'.

One theme that emerged across most interviewees was that the concept of 'participation' appeared to represent, and was presented as, the opposite of traditional museum experiences: active versus passive; multiple entry points and choice versus a single message and prescribed journey; and a conversation versus a didactic view or single opinion. For example, M3 argued that the *Power of 1* was 'participatory in the sense that it's really asking you to join a conversation. I don't think it's … it doesn't present a didactic view of the subject. There is no single opinion about democracy. [It] asks its visitors to participate in this conversation [with] open-ended and ongoing discussion'. The museum director shared her hope that the conversation and choice in the *Power of 1* was transformative and 'that you're able to come out with a broader appreciation and understanding, and you feel like you've got something out of it in an active as opposed to just a passive way' (M5).

This portrayed contestation could be perceived as a threat to the status quo and could explain why some staff used the question to express concerns or criticise the project. Two museum staff members shared their misgivings about the unconventional participatory approach, adding criticisms in response to whether the *Power of 1* was a participatory exhibition. According to M9, terms such as 'exhibition' and 'curated' are reserved for traditional 'museum-y' experiences; thus, the *Power of 1* was devalued as an exhibition because it lacked traditional museum content:

> M9: It's not an exhibition with participatory elements. I think, that is, to me, something different. It is an exhibition built around the four participations. The rooms are divided up with four different ways to participate, with four different questions or prompts. And that will be, for some people, its appeal and for some people … its lack of appeal, *because it isn't balanced out with the other museum-y stuff, you know.*

Similarly, M8 first stated enthusiastic and then confusing compliments between criticisms, commending the research and the 'powerful' questions posed, but believing that the exhibition lacked 'richness' (later revealed in the interview to be written interpretive content and objects). The

'technology [is] … not as effective as it could be' (which was, she said, only partly explained by poor exhibition maintenance), and the generational framing was an incomplete tool to describe people and their experiences, as 'there's much more to them than that, and so even for the boomers or for the … I love boomer. I love the Commodore64 for Generation X, I love it. But there needs … it's … people are more than that' (M8). M8 was also concerned that a single question posed in each of the generation rooms was insufficient and unclear for visitors, suggesting 'a richness there that's missing. I can understand focusing on one question for each generation even though they answered them all, but I think it's actually being able to explain that. Like, there's not that explanation in there why you've got each generation, you've focused on one, but they actually do join together. It's not clear. It's not clear' (M8).

These responses from staff members support the finding that some museum professionals tend to rely on 'cool, managerial and academic responses' to avoid conflict and retain institutional authority (Lynch and Alberti 2010). It also suggests that museum professionals seek to retain institutional power by dismissing unconventional approaches as 'dumbing down' to activate visitor agency (Fleming 2014). The challenges facing museums—passive, controlling, single entry points and fixed expectations—are well-known and were articulated by all interviewees in some way. At the time of the interviews in 2015, these problems continued despite the rhetoric nearly three decades earlier (Vergo 1989) from the new museology to focus on the visitor and not the collection, and to open museums to multiple voices, shared authority and diverse audiences (a rhetoric that has been widely promoted and committed to in most museums' corporate documents, including MoAD). The museum professionals' interviews showed that participatory experiences are perceived to be in opposition to traditional museum experiences and their relationship to visitors. This opposition was apparent whether the interviewee was in favour of activating visitor agency or maintaining existing power relations in a museum environment. Not surprisingly, the proposed solutions to the problems depend on the level of investment in the status quo; thus, visitors' views are important to understand and are explored and presented in Chapters 6 and 7. In Chapter 8, the views of the external project partners, museum director and staff members will then be compared against the visitors' views regarding the content and clarity of messages, perceptions of the exhibition (including the generational framing) and participatory approaches.

5.5.5 Is participation effective?

Interviewees were asked if they thought that participation could be an effective interpretation tool in a museum environment. The museum director acknowledged that for MoAD, with its small and less significant collection, 'participation is an important tool in the museum environment, particularly now as we move into the experience economy. The challenge for some museums—not all museums but for museums, such as us, where we don't have the Rosetta Stone, Tutankhamun's

mask, etc.—is how do you create an experience for people … in a way that's meaningful?' (M5). To the museum director, participation brought a meaningful experience for MoAD visitors. Some of the external partners also responded positively using language that echoed some of the visitor comments, such as comparing participation with traditional museum experiences, helping people to remember the experience through the act of doing, accommodating multiple learning styles and making you think (see Chapters 6 and 7). M2 argued that 'if you're actively engaged in doing something you're going to remember it much more than if you, you know, whether it's being talked at you or you had to read or whatever and you just walked off. It's just how human beings are. We learn by doing'. M1 suggested that the different learning styles and approaches needed to be considered in a museum context to allow for participation to play a role, stating, 'Some people really respond well to the old-school, read labels and be presented with information, and other people completely don't respond to that. So if you want the widest possible accessibility of your ideas you've got to offer different modes of experience'. M4 conceded that he lacked expertise in participation, but he had observed his children in museums and felt that participation 'makes an impact and that actually sparks thinking and, you know, really connects'.

Two external partners conditionally agreed that participation had the potential to be effective provided that it was defined more broadly than leaving a comment (M3 and M6). Viewing the exhibition and other visitors' comments was also regarded by M6 as a valid and meaningful experience, provided it was not a substitute for deeper, 'slow' thinking about important issues. For example, 'the intensity of the [participatory] experience may mean that people rush to opinions on particular issues, when on greater reflection they may moderate their opinion somewhat' (M6).

Some staff also presented important conditions in determining whether participation could be an effective interpretation tool, expressing less enthusiastic views than their director about the prospect of participation in their museum. For slightly different reasons, both M7 and M9 advocated for a 'balance' in interpretation between traditional and participatory approaches. M7 sought to accommodate people who do not want to actively participate in a museum and who prefer 'their sense of space and their sense of the exhibition and their time in the exhibition, [which] is just as valid as those who do [participate]'. M9 argued that some sensitive topics might not suit participatory approaches and 'there needs to be a balance, and I think that creating an experience of learning and information and of, you know, a unique experience is really important, and if participation works for that subject matter, perfect'. While these comments support the role of traditional learning-based and curatorial approaches in museums, it is not an unreasonable assumption that some visitors will always prefer passive museum experiences.

In her response, M8 was initially positive about the potential for participation as an interpretation tool, stating that 'if a museum isn't a place where ideas … can, are able to be out there so that

people can make of it what they will in a lovely, immersive, *safe* environment, I don't think … [museums are] worth their salt'. It is possible that M8 used platitudes such as 'diversity of voice' and 'we've got to represent all of Australia' in an attempt to conceal her discomfort about, for instance, the museum presenting visitors' strong views about Tony Abbott and his policies. Further, M8 expressed concern that visitors (perhaps in their comments) were 'maligning someone personally' and suggested that rather than having everyday visitors share their 'individual' views, the *Power of 1* could be improved with greater 'context' and 'narrative' if the curatorial team researched and presented the views of expert or notable people. Without this additional context and narrative, M8 said that the *Power of 1* exhibition was 'isolated':

> M8: I think as long as the diversity of views are up there, I'm comfortable. I think if people aren't being … maligning someone personally, you know, then I would … on both sides of the fence of things. Those ones where it's very personal and not based on any sort of really concrete, I can understand we wouldn't, no. But I think if people have very strong views, and it's that diversity of voice that has to be there. And sometimes you may not agree with that diversity of voice, but we've got to represent all of Australia.
>
> *RC: And did we need, then, from what you were saying earlier about the context and the narrative, did we need more of a curatorial voice in that mix?*
> M8: I think we needed more context and if that came from … it can be curatorial in that you get curatorial to get those stories together, get that diversity of stories together, but it doesn't then need to be an individual's voice. But I think that diversity of voice, as examples to give other people who think, 'Oh right. So and so thought this', and so others, that's their view of the time and what they remember, 'Ah, yes, I remember that as well'. So some way of getting that, those different stories and that diversity of story as a context would have been good.
>
> *RC: So you were saying context earlier. So would that work in that large [Tally] room?*
> M8: I think if you were wanting people to … I think you need it throughout, because I think to have that continuum of engagement through those four questions, I think there needs to be a continuum of story, of narrative. And it was more isolated than that.

The conventional interpretive technique recommended by M8 was used in several other MoAD exhibitions that have presented diverse but curated voices, thereby controlling the risk of inappropriate comments, upholding the authority of the curator and retaining the subservient role for visitors. M8's proposal sought to maintain the status quo and expressed discomfort regarding the changes to power relations as a result of an overtly participatory experience. M8's concerns will be compared with the visitors' comments to determine whether visitors were confronted by the personal views of other visitors or whether they needed a stronger curatorial context to make sense of and meaning from the exhibition. M8's discomfort will also be compared with any discomfort expressed by visitors during their interviews in Chapter 6. This will provide an opportunity to better understand how discomfort was expressed by staff and visitors.

5.5.6 Risks to participation

Interviewees were asked if there were any risks to participation in a museum or visitor context. Most external contractor interviewees identified at least one risk to the museum, including damage to the heritage building, managing the expectations of stakeholders and losing control of the content. M4 was astutely aware of, and keenly articulated, the need to relinquish control and authority when introducing participatory experiences in museums:

> M4: Ah, I'd say there's risks because, especially, if participatory means you're gathering content from people then of course you're not in control of that content, and so you've got to moderate and potentially curate and … there's a massive tension in cultural heritage at the moment, across the board, where … all of these public institutions are seeking this kind of [participatory] engagement. But it lets in all of these risks and there's an incredible tension between the … desire for authority and control and status that the institution has and the risks of chaos being inappropriate, lack of control that participation involves. So that tug of war is just going to keep going, I think.

The risks to visitors included poor technical maintenance and safety, as well as raising and not meeting visitors' expectations in relation to engaging them in a conversation about Australian democracy, which reinforces the need for museum participation to avoid tokenism. Political science academic M6 discussed the CLEAR framework of political participation (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2006) that encourages citizens' response when they participate (see Chapter 2):

> M6: A lot of the research that we do here on participation, it sort of crystallises around what we call 'the CLEAR model'. And that is, to encourage participation you have to ensure the citizens can, first of all: 'can' do, 'like' to, are 'enabled' to, are 'asked' to and are 'responded' to. And the 'responded' to element is critical to fostering participation on an ongoing basis.
>
> *RC: We [Power of 1] missed the 'R'.*
> M6: Well, I don't think you have actually because, obviously through us [IGPA], you know, we've done the Lateline [TV] program, there's another program that I'm doing tomorrow, there's an SBS program, there's all the conversation pieces, there's been 24 media interviews. So, yeah, so we're doing that but it's not direct response.

I agree that the participants should have received a response, and I acknowledge that the *Power of 1* did not include a response mechanism. However, I am less convinced than M6 that the media interview responses met the expectations of visitors who believed that their comments, and those of other visitors, should have been given to politicians (see Chapter 6).

The museum staff identified risks, including the additional staffing resources required to support a participatory exhibition, the risk of people not participating, the risk of technology failure and the risk of not meeting visitors' expectations. The call for some 'balance' to traditional museum approaches was made when M7 restated her concern that a large proportion of visitors would not participate, and those visitors who did would feel disappointed if they could not see their

contributions in the museum within a short timeframe, stating that visitors 'feel gypped, they feel ripped off, they've gone to the effort so why haven't you?':

> M7: There is that large audience that really just doesn't want to be a participator, just wants to consume. So I think that the risk is being unbalanced in the way in which you produce an exhibition. And also I think that the other risk is being overly dependent on technology. And so if you get so caught up in the digital thing and then the digital thing falls over, what are you left with, basically? [T]here's nothing worse than an exhibition full of [signs saying]… 'We are so sorry, but this piece of equipment isn't working today'.

At the time of the museum professionals' interviews, it was already apparent that some of these risks had eventuated. For example, maintaining the gallery was resource intensive in terms of hanging up visitor contributions from the secret ballot, tidying pencils and paper and restocking ping-pong balls, and the digital, technology-based participatory experiences were often out of order. There were ongoing technological challenges with the digital interactives, and while some of these issues could have been resolved through lengthier testing prior to the exhibition's opening, other issues resulted from poor technical maintenance and slow response times to fix broken devices. For instance, during its one-year showing, there was only one occasion in which I found all technical devices working in the *Power of 1* exhibition. On-site promotion of the exhibition declined after its opening. During one of my observation visits, there was not one piece of on-site promotional material about the *Power of 1*, including external banners that were covered because of building works, a lack of brochures at reception and the closure of the original entry via the main stairs, resulting in visitors needing to go out of their way to engage with the *Power of 1*. Given the internal resistance to, and discomfort with, the participatory approach, it is possible that the lack of support for the project resulted in reluctance to allocate sufficient resources to maintain the project once it had opened and the original project team had left MoAD. However, MoAD is a small organisation, and they may not have had the resources or experience to maintain such a technically complex exhibition, or they may not have appreciated the resources required for a '24/7 service', as articulated by external museum contractor M1:

> M1: For the museum, there really needs to be a reframing of the engagement model. You can't build an interactive platform for engagement without treating it as a 24/7 service. So the current thing—this isn't just MoAD—a lot of museums are still working on the basis that they can tender, get something built and it will just run. The catch is that for the budgets that are available, it's unrealistic to have something that is going to run 24/7 in public. So, you know, the way in which these experiences are conceived, commissioned, operated and maintained and decommissioned needs a lot of further discussion. Because the risk of not doing that is that there's a level of expectations not being met, both by museums—the commissioners, the curators, the producers—but also visitors coming and seeing something's broken or it doesn't do what it says on the tin. So it's a huge jump, and it's related to complexity. It's also related to the nature of digital production where, with all the best intentions in the world, it simply isn't possible to have things that can be guaranteed to stay up.

Museum staff member M9 agreed that through the *Power of 1* exhibition, MoAD learned some valuable lessons about technology but would be unlikely to do an exhibition like the *Power of 1* again:

> M9: For a lot of different things, even just … timeline was probably too compressed. I think we have learned some very useful lessons about tech. I don't think it's a field we're particularly experienced in. [It needs to be] stability first. It's got to last for a year. It starts with stability. If you're telling me this function will make it unstable, we lose that function.

As well as the technical failures, M9 restated that the *Power of 1* participatory exhibition needed more traditional museum content and additional detailed information about generations, key historical events and clearer learning outcomes. She also suggested that visitors needed clearer direction to understand and learn from each of the generation rooms:

> M9: *Personally I'd like to see more museum-y stuff.* So in the spaces, I would have loved to see a bit more about the generations. The information about the generations is sort of transient: it's posters and it's film clips and things like that. Tell me those key things that were happening to that generation that made them, which is on that written stuff. That's just, you know, I think that consideration, particularly when you're going to focus on these generations, and particularly watching people go into their generation room only. It's like, 'Go into the other generations *and learn something*'.

The risk, then, that M9 articulated was that *Power of 1* was not able to be transformed into a conventional learning-based exhibition with an emphasis on historical events, upholding the traditional authority for curators and a passive role for visitors. This was not an aim for the exhibition. In fact, all interviewees stated that *Power of 1* was going to be a different kind of museum experience. I suggest that an additional risk in using participatory experiences in a museum context is the internal resistance to change and its effect on the delivery, promotion and maintenance of the exhibition. The strategy to use external contractors who were open-minded to trying new approaches and shared a philosophical commitment to empowering visitors and democratising the museum experience succeeded in introducing an unconventional participatory exhibition. However, unconventional approaches can ultimately fail when museum staff do not embrace or support change and proceed to evaluate new approaches using their own values and anecdotal evidence, rather than examining the experience using audience research or considering the visitors' perspective.

5.6 Process

5.6.1 Exhibition development process for *Power of 1*

Interviewees who were involved in the exhibition's development process were asked how they would describe that process. As most of the exhibition was externally developed, the only internal professionals interviewed for this section were the museum director and project manager. Most people involved in the exhibition's development process were external contractors who noted the

mostly iterative (rather than linear) approach that responded to ideas as they emerged. This approach is not uncommon in their fields of digital interactive design and academia, but it was very different for MoAD. The museum director confirmed that MoAD 'started at a point with a particular idea … a fairly conventional narrative, linear narrative, object-based approach [*From Activism to Apathy*]. It wasn't going to deliver the sort of experience and ask the questions that we wanted to' (M5). The project then moved to an iterative, participatory approach that was open and collaborative, and the desired outcomes were not known until late in the process and depended largely on the contributions of visitors. I can remember deliberately and consciously choosing this approach at the beginning of the project. I wanted to follow a different and experimental path than the highly structured, controlling and inflexible processes I perceived in the museum, and I wanted to accommodate the best and most creative ideas into the project for as long as possible to 'set it free'. I became aware that the participatory exhibition was not the only output that would be new and experimental. The processes that were pursued were also radically different from conventional museum project management processes and were informed by 'radical trust' (Fichter 2006; McLean 2007; Lynch and Alberti 2010) to result in the *Power of 1*. External contractor M1 noted her familiarity with the shift in approach:

> M1: It started off as a linear response to a brief and then became quite iterative in response to frank and open collaboration and discussions. It was iteratively expanded well beyond the original scope. But from the, for the production studio side, all our processes are highly interactive and iterative because they have to be … so we have to be prepared to go in a completely different direction or to respond to changes to brief.

The open and iterative approach was challenging but satisfying for most of the external contractors. M3 described the process as 'really remarkable', even though he had not been involved in the development of large exhibitions before:

> M3: It was clear that the museum and the people running the project were very open to possibilities. There wasn't a very pre-defined, prescriptive idea of what the outcomes should be. And that was really interesting. I was really impressed at how long that conversation remained open. While there very clear roles, responsibilities, budgets, you know, everything, all the structures you'd expect to see in place, there was a very strong encouragement that people conversed and crossed those lines … there might be ideas there that are untenable, but we'd better … think big before you lock into small ideas. So that was really good. I imagine it was probably quite exhausting too for the people involved for the long haul. I was only involved for a short period. I mean, in an academic context it's not uncommon … but what was really impressive in the context of the museum was it's not an academic context, you know.

M2 said it was 'actually a good thing' that the process was 'being developed as we went and … plans [were] reviewed and changed'. From the perspective of M6—whose role had clearer outputs and deadlines, including data analysis—the process was 'a mixture' of 'iterative deliberation and consultation' and 'linear analysis'. However, the aspect that M6 appreciated the most was that 'it was a very inclusive approach. We felt very much as if, you know, our views were taken into

account every step of the way. It was good to collaborate with people who were very open-minded and not fixed in their views, and I think that worked both ways' (M6). These comments show that open development processes need to be respectful of participants and can have a variety of fixed and defined roles and outputs as required.

This approach to keeping ideas, collaboration and structure open to change for as long as possible was not without its frustrations. Having to remain open and responsive meant that some early elements were not incorporated into the end product. For M2, this was 'frustrating' and 'wasteful … having locked-in various suppliers for various elements of the content before interactive design had been done, which is just, you know, it's like locking yourself into a particular supplier for materials on a building before you start the architecture'. M4 noted the challenge of the sustained openness of the process, which did not include a defined brief, and 'all of those parameters … remained quite open for quite a long time into the process'. M4 conceded that the uncertainty of the continual development of ideas and open collaboration was 'difficult', but acknowledged that 'a more straightforward way' would have involved 'locked-down' roles and outcomes:

> M4: It might have been possible to do something like, say, 'Ok, well the generation room, that's where the participation happens. MOD can design and do that. And then there'll be this room which will be tangible data and that, and we'll do that'. And that would have been way easier as a design process, but it would have been a much poorer outcome because there wouldn't have been that integration of those elements. And so, you know, the whole thing for me feels incredibly coherent and well designed, and really unified. And so, I think carving up and, you know, specifying the outcomes in advance would have really harmed that.

It is noteworthy that the open and uncertain process helped to result in an integrated, creative and quality exhibition design. Structured development processes are typically defended in museums because they can provide these same outcomes, but in practice the inflexibility of these conventional processes can result in locked-in ideas and approaches early in the process before the integration and cross-fertilisation of ideas, content and messages can be achieved.

For museum staff member M7, this iterative process felt 'strange' because it was so unlike the structured approaches that were used to manage the development of other museum exhibitions. M7 was responsible for managing procurement, monitoring milestones and contracts, and liaising with other museum staff. It was a complex and demanding role with reporting requirements and responsibilities that were not conducive to the open-ended approach of the project. I believe that the project would not have been achieved without the detailed project management of M7 who, while occasionally uncomfortable with the 'quite intense' unconventional approach, worked professionally and effectively to deliver the project. M7 explained that because 'we were almost building the show as we went, as things happened and as new ideas came to the surface or as more information became available', the open, collaborative and unconventional exhibition development

process presented significant challenges for MoAD, a national cultural institution in a protected heritage building with necessarily strict financial, legal and administrative requirements (as a government institution expending public funds):

> M7: Oh God (laughs). It was such a strange process because it wasn't a standard project team process that OPH [MoAD] would have used in the past because it didn't really have a curatorial component. It didn't have objects. So from a project team point of view, generally [usually] the main players in each exhibition project team are curators and collection managers and they weren't really a part of this. Most of the project management was very, erm, it was very focused on a couple of people—you and me—the finance people and the contractors. And so, you know, it was more about pulling people in when we needed them, rather than, sort of, the more project, standardised project team approach.

M7 advised that supporting the open process within government procedures and obligations was 'extremely time-consuming'. In fact, M7 felt strongly that not enough time was allocated to accommodate 'real thinking time that you would normally have early on in a project. And that's because, you know, we had a very clear set of expectations from management as to what date that exhibition would go in, or at least that it would go in in 2014'.

This open-ended approach to exhibition development accommodated a more democratic, collaborative co-production of multiple, and at times conflicting, perspectives and ideas. This type of approach was an attempt to produce participatory experiences and processes and create a cultural change within the museum to be more visitor-focused and inclusive of new ideas. The open-ended approach helped to ensure that the project team was not controlling the outcomes or process, and that visitors' contributions, with a commitment to 'radical trust', genuinely shaped the content of the exhibition. However, such a significant change in process and culture was difficult to accommodate in a government context and should have been acknowledged by providing additional time to the project to navigate governance requirements, communicate the unconventional approach to participants early in the process and avoid waste, duplication and frustration. Training could also have been provided to staff and collaborators who were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the open approach.

As the process was new to most of the project team, the interviewees were asked how the open and uncertain approach to developing and delivering the project made them feel. Some of the principles of participation, including open-endedness, giving agency and welcoming different and conflicting voices, had become part of the development process itself, and internal project manager M7 noted that the process felt 'strange' and 'intense'. The external museum professionals were not completely familiar with the approach, and most felt that it was a positive but sometimes uncomfortable experience, supported by shared ambitions and open and respectful communication. M4 felt 'inspired by the openness' but was sometimes 'concerned, you know, about not feeling the edges'. M1 said the process 'felt real' and 'ambitious' and 'did have learning ongoing, and it had a

significant risk'. She contrasted the *Power of 1* with previous projects she had worked on, 'there's been a real inability to grasp the reality of the situation and people can put up barriers until they hit the wall, and we didn't [on the *Power of 1*], you know, we had issues, we had problems, but we never actually hit any walls or had any huge disasters because we were flagging things as we went' (M1). M2 also enjoyed the process, even though there was some tension, because it felt creative to collaborate and produce something that was so new:

> M2: Of course there are moments when you don't enjoy things, but what felt good to me was the ability to integrate different areas together … bringing together these threads from all different people and creating something new and exciting and engaging that hadn't been done before. How it felt along the way, you know, yes, somewhat rushed, somewhat … a little bit disjointed sometimes, you know? There was some tension around the creative process but you felt creative.

The museum director felt the process was 'exciting':

> M5: It was unclear exactly what the outcome would be when we started out, but there were extremely creative people who were open to exploring something different, and confident enough to take some risks, including, you know, the partnerships, the teams, etc., that allowed it to take off. Because it could have been far less successful in the hands of different people. It was the combination of your creativity, confidence in the participatory space, pulling the right team together, having Canberra University [IGPA] who were open… and their willingness to, again, try something new. The thing for me about it was the absolute collaborative nature of it, with key partners, that just took it beyond what I would consider to be the sort of museum experience we had done in the past at this museum.

Typically, museum exhibition development processes avoid conflict and discomfort, but this case study shows that as long as the project is managed with respect and trust, it is possible for project partners to disagree on some aspects or even feel uncomfortable, as explained by M6 from IGPA:

> M6: I thought it was highly professional. It was one of the more professional encounters that I've had with a governmental organisation in my career, and I've had lots of them, hundreds of them, all around the world. Whereas this was a very different experience, you know? Clearly you guys made up your mind relatively quickly … but once you decided, right, these are the people you want to collaborate with, then there was strong trust on all sides and we moved forward very, very quickly. And that was a great feeling to be part of that, I have to say, you know because, you know, it's not an easy thing to do.

The political science academic's contention that trust was the key component that ensured the progress and success of the project reflects the arguments of museum studies scholars, such as McLean (2007), that the online library community's advocacy of 'radical trust' (Fichter 2006) is needed to democratise museums. The trusting, respectful, open-ended and collaborative approach of the external parties redefined and extended the museum experience, even though it was a sometimes frustrating and uncomfortable experience. The discomfort that some participants felt supports Lynch and Alberti's (2010, 15) call for museums to seek 'dissensus' (not consensus) to

accommodate 'multiple and contested perspectives that invite participants and visitors into further dialogue'.

5.6.2 Lessons for the future

Interviewees were asked if they would re-use this participatory exhibition development style and how the process could be improved. A longer lead time was mentioned by nearly all interviewees. The museum director said she would take the elements that worked from the open-ended collaboration for future projects, indicating that she would 'ditch' the 'initial linear approach' of *From Activism to Apathy* and stating, 'So, what we're doing now for the next one [MoAD exhibition] is starting at the point of, "What sort of conversation do we want to have?"' (M5). The external partners agreed that they would use the process again and suggested several improvements, including a clearer budget and a post-opening maintenance responsibility framework. M1 suggested that collaborators should be selected earlier in the process to shape the full scope of the project, and that key museum staff—in particular, IT and media staff—should be involved earlier to achieve greater continuity and avoid post-opening maintenance issues. M2, the external producer/project manager who was responsible for delivering outputs and meeting contractual obligations, noted that clearer budget and timeframe constraints would have improved the process. M4 suggested that the process would work better if the same team had an opportunity to develop a similar project, and the open and uncertain nature of the project was flagged and understood by all parties at the beginning of the process. However, he acknowledged that because of the open development process, greater clarity around how the clearly defined goals were to be achieved would have been desirable, but probably not possible:

> M4: One of the things that worked really well was that … the museum articulated the aims and the rationale for the show very clearly … and sort of stuck to your guns on that. It was pretty strongly articulated. What, I guess, what wasn't and what probably couldn't be was, 'Okay, well how do you translate that into reality?' So it was a really broad, it was a broad conceptual set of things which we all were committed to and agreed we had to get to, but the practical pathway to that was unknown and probably had to be.

Museum staff member M7, who project managed the exhibition in accordance with government procurement processes, would not use the approach again. The process, she said, needed more time and greater clarity to ensure its elements were deliverable, such as tender processes:

> M7: In an ideal world, as I said, we would have a much longer lead up time … we were kind of trying to design a show and we were getting that information at the same time, and so, you know, all of our thoughts and everything kept shifting and morphing as a result. Whereas if you had given yourself much more lead time to get all that kind of academic rigour sorted out earlier, then we would have had the time to really think it out a lot more clearly and definitely have gone to tender and all those sorts of things.

M7 is correct: traditional project management frameworks provide greater predictability, stability and certainty, but they can also limit creativity, risk-taking and innovation. These frameworks ensure responsible accountability of public spending but they also serve to maintain the status quo as I had experienced on previous museum project teams. This point was mentioned by M3, an academic undertaking digital practice-based research, who argued that it was 'important to embrace processes like that [used for the *Power of 1*] because it is so easy to just slip straight into a mould, you know? There's a lot of proven templates and processes and you can just do it and it's paint by numbers. And so it can be really boring'. The trade-off between certainty and innovation, comfort and frustration and conventional and experimental approaches needs to be assessed for government-funded museum projects that are trying to activate visitor agency. For most of the *Power of 1*'s project participants, the open-ended iterative process was a positive experience, but greater lead time and clarity around roles, budgets and outputs could have improved the process. M1 provided a sound suggestion that wider inclusion was required of internal staff members who were responsible for delivering the IT and media aspects of the project following its opening. Because of the internal resistance and 'suspicion' (M5) towards this project, the project team had deliberately relied on external contractors who were more likely to extend and support the project rather than hinder and constrain it. I concede this was a short-sighted strategy for the participatory exhibition because so much of the content and experience was delivered after the exhibition opened to the public, and both the digital and tangible participatory activities required regular maintenance by staff. The process could have been improved by engaging internal staff for the project during its development. This would have provided staff members with an understanding of the vision, ambition and goals of the project, and it might have avoided the poor maintenance and low promotion of the exhibition (see Chapter 3) once the original project team had disbanded.

5.6.3 Expectations of the project

The interviewees were asked if they remembered their expectations of the project at the beginning, and, if so, whether those expectations had been met. There were mixed responses from the external contractors. M2 stated that her expectations were exceeded because it was 'a more open experience than [she] thought it would be, working with a government museum'; however, the original expectations for the project were written on the tender documents that were originally contracted. Given the iterative nature of the project, the tender documents did not capture the evolution of the project as it expanded and changed shape in response to new partners and ideas. This shows how government procurement processes, while necessary, might limit the creativity and collaborative opportunities in the publicy-funded museum sector. M1 was not sure if her expectations had been met because the museum attracted low attendance numbers that led to low 'visitor take-up'. M3 did not have 'big expectations' at the beginning of the project and felt that he was involved as a 'guest' with a 'consulting' role, but was 'blown away, actually, by how much of the ideas actually came to

be implemented'. M4 felt the same way as his academic colleague, M3. M6, an academic who had initially thought that his role would involve 'some interesting analysis on the survey' felt 'proud' to have been involved in the exhibition, and stated that his expectations were 'far exceeded'.

The museum director and the project manager's responses to this question were the most interesting because they revealed some of the internal cultural obstacles that presented themselves during the development of this unconventional exhibition. The museum director said her expectations had been 'exceeded beyond all expectation because of the vibrancy of the physical experience, but more importantly the calibre of the conversation [coming from visitor participation] is something I've never seen' (M5). She believed the exhibition design and aesthetics contributed to this achievement:

> M5: I think that having worked through each of those rooms and considered each of the questions, by the time you get to the 'I would fight for my right to' [secret ballot in the Tally Room] there is an openness of what you're thinking that has led to a level of consideration that is extraordinary. The other thing that I thought was quite remarkable is just the aesthetics of it. When I walk into that selfie room it is like walking into an art installation, you know? There is just such … each of the rooms, but that one in particular is just, you go 'wow' as you walk in.

The *Power of 1* project had 'come to embody the purpose of the museum'; however, the museum director lamented that 'it took a lot of work to get the museum [staff] to buy into the idea' (M5). The museum director explained that 'it was very surprising for me, quite early on in my being here, at how unwilling the museum was to buy into something like this' (M5). The resistance shown by the 'conventional staff' members (who were not on the *Power of 1* project team) at MoAD was a significant problem for the experimental project:

> M5: At one point there was … in the framing of how we approached it … nobody was willing to run with it. You know, there was such a level of suspicion about the approach, a combination of my coming from outside the industry, a combination of … it's a different way to us doing it, it didn't have the three-year, locked-in, concrete forward plan that people were really keen to have … and the [MoAD organisational] risk appetite. It's very, very … it's very low.

This resistance and corporate culture from within MoAD led to the engagement of external contractors, partners and temporary internal contract staff to pursue the experimental project. In my opinion, there was a team of outsiders delivering the *Power of 1* exhibition. According to the museum director, this led to a situation comprising the 'right people with the right set of skills and the right openness to have a conversation' (M5) to deliver the exhibition. The museum director was unfazed by concerns that the unconventional approach could fail because 'in a conversation sense that's fine too, you know?' (M5). The museum director, as head of a federal government institution, then carefully noted that various measures were implemented by the project team to manage the risk of visitors not participating in the exhibition.

It is possible that open projects such as the *Power of 1*, which have no prescribed outcome at the beginning of the project, are more likely to exceed expectations because the expectations are usually undefined in the first place. MoAD project manager M7 said she had 'no idea what [her] … expectations were' at the beginning of the project. While she reiterated her frustration about the lack of conventional processes and structures, she also acknowledged that her confidence in the project and its participatory approach grew to a point where she 'started to feel a bit more confident that we were actually going to pull something off':

> M7: I think as time went by, I became more confident of what the end product was and, in fact, I think the movement to the participatory element was what started to convince me that we could make this work. I think in the early days, I was actually incredibly sceptical about the whole thing because, you know, we had acres and acres of paper that had been written [during *From Activism to Apathy*], we had all kinds of discussions, we had meetings that were just not particularly successful. There was, you know, everyone seemed to have a different idea about what this show was and what it might achieve, from department to department [in MoAD]. You know, you name it, nobody really had a clear idea, and I certainly didn't and I'll be brutally honest: you were really the only one who had a true, clear vision about where it was going to go. And that includes Daryl [museum director M5]. I don't think Daryl had that vision either.

M7 described two interesting aspects relating to the museum staff's internal resistance to change, which will be discussed more fully in the next section of this chapter. First, even traditional museum processes (like those used in *From Activism to Apathy*) can present risks. Much time and therefore money, paper and energy was invested in that failed proposal, and M7 acknowledged that there was disunity between the different museum departments (albeit a not uncommon attribute of museum organisations, not simply in relation to participatory experiences). The argument against new and experimental approaches because they are risky should be challenged. As noted by the museum director, risks are everywhere and can be carefully managed. Second, despite M7's previously stated disinterest in taking an open-ended approach to developing exhibitions, over time, she built confidence and felt more comfortable with the project and its methodology. This shows that initial scepticism among museum staff towards open development approaches and participatory interpretation may be overturned given exposure to, and experience in new ways of managing, projects. The museum director described a significant level of resistance from her own staff towards both her and the project. For the *Power of 1*, this necessitated the engagement of a team of outsiders (including internal contractors, external partners and suppliers whose contracts were not renewed once the exhibition opened) to realise the experimental project's vision. This was a necessary strategy at the time. However, based on M7's indication that her attitude and confidence grew over time, it is possible that with time the corporate culture at MoAD and other similar museums could change and be more experimental with unconventional approaches and exhibitions.

5.7 Internal resistance

The three museum staff members who were closely involved in the exhibition once it opened to the public were asked additional questions using ordinary language interview techniques to uncover the meaning of words and concepts used in the everyday language of museum professionals to examine if they viewed the world from a perspective that was different to the visitors and external partners. Lynch and Alberti (2010) identified a polite aversion to conflict in the negotiation of power during exhibition development. I was interested to understand how participation was perceived by the museum professionals who maintained and championed the exhibition after the exhibition development team's roles were concluded. The interview quotes included in this section are longer because they provide rare insight into institutional culture (and often resistance) that exists within museums, particularly MoAD.

The responses to the questions by M9 and M10 were similar and in some ways expected. M9 and M10 viewed participation as a good thing for museums because it engaged visitors and added a layer of meaning. In their view, the anonymous and tangible participatory experiences were the most successful, and the digital and less anonymous interactives were unsuccessful. M9, the staff member responsible for exhibition maintenance and whose role was under-resourced and time-consuming, expressed a desire several times that staff keep the exhibition space 'clean and neat'. M9 did not value the written visitors' contributions that were 'silly', 'junk', 'gobbledegook', a 'scribble' or off-topic, or the digital contributions that 'are not of huge value'. 'Lots of people said "hi," and I've deleted them all', said M9. 'I've kept, you know, one or two':

> M9: In gen X, I think people are possibly having too much fun with the keyboard. Lots of just 'f-f-f-f-f-f' [e.g., repeated keystrokes and some swearing], you know, things. And then you've got gen Y, which, having just been school holidays, is a really interesting example. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of kids, hundreds of them. It's just pages, you flick through pages and pages of children. *Their engagement is not very authentic*, but it's being used, so.
>
> *RC: So what do you mean by 'authentic'?*
> M9: Ah, they're just making selfies of themselves, or saying 'hi mum', or every now and then there is something in there and adults certainly make more authentic contributions. But so the mode of participation is obviously engaging through that age group, unbelievable numbers of children, but they're not necessarily taking the prompt or things like that. But they're doing it, so that the mechanism is good. *The responses are not of huge value.*

When MoAD's moderation policy for the *Power of 1* was being developed, most internal discomfort within museum management related to inappropriate comments that were 'for example racist, sexist, homophobic, obscene, or threatening' (MoAD 2014a). Interestingly, this concern barely eventuated, as M9 advised, 'We've only had half a dozen or less things that we've hidden from view because of offensive nature or "Kill Tony Abbott" or "homosexuals are wicked"'. However, the so-

called trivial or insignificant visitor contributions caused museum staff some significant discomfort and most were removed. This approach contradicted the original moderation policy for the exhibition, and, I thought, illustrated that there was no longer an internal champion for the project. When I asked M9 if the participation was democratic, she answered, 'Err, it's not a word I would necessarily use. It's not undemocratic, I guess. I mean, in the end, we are culling people's stuff'. This was very different to the original vision for the project. Her response assumed an entitlement for museum professionals to control and censor visitors, perhaps as thought police. 'They know they're in a government building' M9 contended, suggesting that this surpassed the expectations of a museum environment—so much for the widely embraced rhetoric within museums that support Gurian's (1995) view that museums are safe places for dangerous ideas. These statements were in contrast to the vision for the project that sought to activate visitor agency and redress the power imbalance between curators and visitors to MoAD. On a more pragmatic note, M9's comments demonstrated the reality of the demands of exhibition maintenance in a museum environment. In hearing the revised policy of how contributions were moderated and edited, I was reminded of McLean's (2007) case study of Exploratorium staff who had removed visitor comments about love or anniversaries and, ultimately, obstructed visitors' perspectives, the opportunity for visitors to claim a place in the museum and maintained museum professionals' control of their environment. This also occurred among MoAD staff, who failed to heed Simon's (2010, 225) advice that 'even inconsequential visitor comments are important to include when your goal is visitor empowerment'.

M9 had some reservations about the unconventional and participatory approach and conceded that she preferred the 'expert voice, and the intellectual argument and the thoroughly researched and accurate thing', but she also demonstrated an openness to new approaches and a thoughtful pragmatism about visitors' responses to exhibitions. In the early days of the exhibition, M9 spent a great deal of time in the gallery handling general and technical maintenance, but acknowledged that she 'used to spend a lot more time up there than I do now'. This demonstrated a reduced investment in the exhibition, partially reflecting the 'set and forget' approach to developing exhibitions and then moving on to the next one that M1 had referred to above. I also suspect that this may have been part of the organisational withdrawal from this unconventional project. M9 made claims regarding visitors that should be compared with the visitors' interviews (Chapter 6). For example, that 'older people find it harder [to participate]. I think the technology defeats them quite quickly', that visitors want to 'leave their mark' on an exhibition and was why, she asserted, the audio experience was unsuccessful and that the 'gobbledegook' made the experience less interesting for non-participating/non-contributing 'passive' visitors:

> M9: To make the experience okay for the passive [non-contributing/participating] viewer and visitor, you have to get rid of a lot of that gobbledegook because otherwise it could be pages of it. But it's such good … it's great material, once the other stuff has gone. It's a whole different experience. So if you're not participating, if you're passive and you're

> actually interested in what people have done, to flick through the gen X stuff is great, but you have to … like, the more times you see 'hi, hi, hi, mum' or gobbledegook, the less interesting it is for you overall. Because if you read those, you know there's someone who's written about voting for the first time and all that stuff is lovely, but you have to extract it.

M10 spent a great deal of time in the exhibition space immediately after the opening of the *Power of 1*, providing support and interpretation to visitors. She held a very open view of participation that was in line with some of the external contractors, and saw it as 'anything … it could be, again, just standing, observing, or it could be touch and engaging with an object. It could be voicing an opinion'. She was in favour of participation because it engaged visitors and invited them to have an opinion, and contrasted this with traditional museum experiences using similar language to that used by visitors (see Chapter 6):

> M10: Well, a traditional way of experiencing a museum, you stand there and you observe. That is still a form of engaging, you're observing something, whereas the way we experience our world around us is by touching, it's through sensation. By walking into a museum enabling people to do that, it offers that, I suppose, sensory level, the next level up. So it's not *just* sight or—yeah, observing—you can touch, you can feel, you can voice, you can.
> *RC: Yeah. And does that help people retain it? Does it help people learn more? What do you think that achieves?*
> M10: [I] would say that would assist them in retaining something, again, because they're developing an opinion because they *actually have to think about* what they're doing.

M10 observed visitors in conversation, usually within their groups, about the content of the exhibition, and in particular about other visitors' written (rather than audio or video) comments or the memories that were provoked from the generation rooms, stating that 'it kind of opens a conversation. It opens a dialogue which you don't normally get in other spaces' of MoAD. M10 felt strongly that the issue of privacy and anonymity played a greater role in whether people participated, rather than age or confidence with technology. M10 restated, as previously noted in this chapter, her view that older visitors were more likely to leave messages because they were confident and had already formulated opinions. These specific claims will be evaluated against the visitors' experiences in Chapter 8.

While many of M9 and M10's responses resonated with the responses from the visitors' interviews (see Chapters 6 and 7) and my own participant observations, some of the comments from M8 were contradictory. While M8's answers were often introduced with a positive statement or platitude, they tended towards negative judgements about the exhibition, its participatory approach and defensiveness regarding conventional museum experiences:

> M8: I must admit I'm … I think the principle of it is great. I think it's a great research topic, and I think it is … there's really important questions that it's asking. I just don't know whether it works in that exhibition style, and I think it does, I think if you really want that sort of meaningful engagement you do need more face to face with it … and you need more context as well. And I think that's the challenge I think with that space.

> *RC: So what do you mean by face to face?*
> M8: I think there does need to be—and it could be done within the group, the school groups themselves—but that more facilitated discussion and debate, because that's what you're wanting. You're wanting to spark internal discussion but also discussion with others about, you know, their views on what works, what doesn't work, how they could make democracy better. So a lot of it is a discussion-based activity almost. So ways to facilitate that and to give people, but also to give a narrative about how different people through different generations have felt in that environment, and why they respond the way they do and all of that. I just think it needs more of that.

M8 felt strongly that greater 'context' was needed and that the exhibition was only meaningful after the introduction of 'facilitated' programs in which visitors would feel 'safe' (a word used repeatedly by M8 to justify her claims made on behalf of visitors) to contribute. As the interview progressed, M8 conceded that she had not done 'a lot of general public work' within the exhibition and had done more work on facilitated school group programs that were orchestrated or controlled by the museum:

> M8: A lot of discussion. So, basically, that's where having a facilitator that is able *to make sure that their voices are the ones that are talking*. But it's almost like an orchestra leader, being able to gather those different voices together and for people to be able to hear each other and work with each other to have a really good discussion.

It's unclear in M8's characterisation whether the facilitator is trying to have their voice heard or those of the visitors. There was a sense that M8 was underestimating museum visitors when she characterised their ability to make meaning, leave a comment or use technology. She had already stated that 'educated, middle-class, Anglo' visitors were more likely to participate. Again raised was the idea that museums needed to make 'safe' experiences for visitors who needed support to engage and participate:

> M8: I think it's one of those ones—it's an exhibition that, for people like myself, would be able to engage with a lot more easily than other members of our visitor audience. I think for some members of our visitor audience, they're not used to being able to … expressing their voice in those different ways and so it is a real challenge for them. And any ways of making that more, more accessible, more in context, more safe, I suppose, the better.

She also stated, 'So you're looking at, probably a *better educated* … you'll get more responsive and more thoughtful ones [responses] from people that feel more comfortable in that environment talking about those issues. And some people don't' (M8). M8 had a very strong preference for traditional object-based museum experiences, despite the rhetoric in favour of participation, when she stated:

> M8: I think the only thing I would say, and I think this is … and it doesn't … I think in telling a story, I think if there were *more objects or more personality* behind each of those rooms that would help. That would enrich it to give it a flavour, to give it a feel, to give it a personality more. I think *that may help as well get the people in there.*

M8 appeared to suggest that people were not attending the *Power of 1* because it had insufficient objects, a problematic claim given the on- and off-site promotion of the *Power of 1* appeared to decline soon after its opening. The reasons among audiences for visiting the *Power of 1* will be further explored in Chapter 6 and could shed light on this claim. I sought to clarify M8's assertion that collection objects were needed to make *Power of 1* more successful. M8 made a number of suggestions:

> *RC: Are you suggesting that a more sort of traditional museum display of collection objects and interpretation, those sorts of layers would be helpful?*
> M8: I think layers. I don't necessarily think traditional. But I do think those layers. I do think any of those ways that you give depth to a narrative or a storyline. And that could be through video, it could be through sound, it could be through touch and feel things, whatever else. But some way that gives that greater context and more immersive experience, I suppose … a more immersive experience.

These suggestions were interpretation approaches already used and accepted within MoAD, including video, audio and hands-on experiences. M8 added that these additional but conventional interpretation approaches were needed because visitors needed more 'obvious' approaches:

> M8: I think you have to give more of that flavour, and sometimes film can do it, sometimes people talking about their experiences can do it more, but making it a bit more obvious because it's in there to a certain extent. But making it more obvious and having examples of, yeah, all that sort of stuff.

M8 established throughout the interview her discomfort with unconventional interpretation and approaches that give agency or shift power to the visitor. This is confounding given that her primary role as senior manager was to service and advocate on behalf of visitors and school children. Her comments in the interview expanded on these earlier statements and will be compared with visitors' experiences in the following chapters (see Chapters 6 and 7). M9 was not in as senior a role but held considerable responsibility for exhibition maintenance. M10 held an entry-level position supporting visitors and was the most open-minded regarding the participatory approach. It occurred to me to consider whether people arrive at museums with fixed ideas and approaches or whether their attitudes are shaped by the environment in which they work. It is not helpful to argue on an individual basis because that is time-consuming and ineffective. The observations and judgements of these museum professionals will be compared with visitor experiences in subsequent chapters.

5.8 Conclusion

The museum professionals' interviews revealed that participatory techniques, such as open-ended collaboration, keeping options open, welcoming different voices and perspectives and iterative concept and content development can be discomforting when it is not possible to 'feel the edges' (M3). However, these techniques are significantly less confronting for external museum

collaborators than for internal museum staff. A 'radical trust' was applied to the development of the *Power of 1* exhibition and was intended for its delivery to visitors. This trust aimed to shape, expand, balance and strengthen power relationships between all involved parties, from development to delivery phases, and the visitors themselves. In part, the experimental participatory approach to developing the *Power of 1* exhibition was an attempt to circumvent the resistance from internal museum staff who preferred the lengthier, controlled and conventional, object-based and curated approaches to museum experiences. Although it was possible to engage committed and creative external collaborators to develop the exhibition and demonstrate that there were other valid ways to produce museum experiences, resistance to change remained within the museum. This was demonstrated in the post-opening maintenance, on-site promotion and staffing support, which diminished once the original project team of mostly outsiders was no longer involved and there was no longer a champion for the project, despite the museum director's stated enthusiasm for the project. Internal opposition was also observed through the changes to the moderation of visitors' comments, which did not support the open and trusting policy that was originally adopted.

The project, which trialled participation in process and product, was made possible by a number of factors that resulted in 'utopian' and 'participatory fantasy' (Carpentier 2011, 199) conditions. For instance, MoAD had low visitor numbers and a confident new museum director that allowed the organisation to risk an iterative and undefined participatory approach. External contractors who were comfortable with an open, democratic and collaborative approach took the place of oppositional internal staff members who may otherwise have developed the project. Although the project progressed through the development to launch phase, it was stressful because there was opposition and antagonism towards the project from within the museum, it needed more time to develop and to comply with government procurement processes, and once the original project team had completed their roles post-opening, the *Power of 1* required resources and a champion to maintain the exhibition and achieve the intended cultural change. There are other lessons learned. Early in the project, it would have been advantageous to articulate to all parties that this was an experimental approach that would feel frustrating or disjointed at times, but sought to achieve a greater goal of democratising the museum experience and activating visitor agency.

The *Power of 1* project was made possible because of utopian conditions and resulted in a once-in-a-career experience. The museum director and most external museum professionals believed it to have been a worthwhile and meaningful achievement, describing the open approach as supported by 'strong trust' (M6) and feeling 'real' (M1), 'creative' (M5), 'professional' (M6), inspired (M4), 'ambitious' (M1) and 'exciting' (M2 and M5). Although the case study did not appear to generate support from internal staff towards participatory visitor experiences and processes, it produced meaningful—if uncomfortable—results about how museum practice could better meet audience needs and replace conventional, undemocratic approaches to audience engagement. For instance,

internal staff members relied on personal and untested opinions (rather than audience research) to evaluate proposed visitor experiences and approaches, including participation, which were perceived to be the opposite of conventional museum interpretation. An open, honest and rigorous commitment to trialling new approaches as well as an acceptance that it is fine to not know all the answers could benefit and improve the museum sector's practice. The use of rhetoric and false compliments by some internal staff, as well as language that was designed to close debate, such as 'safe' and 'authentic', could be tools to resist change and inhibit the museum sector's ability to evolve. Therefore, it is important to evaluate whether museum professionals accurately understand and predict their visitors' needs, responses and abilities, and whether they perceive that visitors play an equal role in the meaning-making of museums. This will be explored when visitor responses to the *Power of 1* are examined in Chapters 6 and 7 and in the discussion in Chapter 8. These findings may be uncomfortable for the museum sector. However, to repurpose Adams' (1939) words from last century, similar to democracy, museums need to be 'challenged, irritated, and amused as well as educated in common understanding' if they are to be democratic. It may be time to acknowledge and pursue the value of 'discensus' (Lynch and Alberti 2010) (not consensus) to change the museum sector's culture, accommodate multiple perspectives, be relevant to and inclusive of diverse audiences and respect and activate visitor agency.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS PART B

Visitor exit interviews

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, museum professionals, in particular MoAD internal staff members, made a number of claims about how visitors would respond to unconventional approaches to museum interpretation using participation. This chapter will present the findings interviews with visitors as they left the *Power of 1* exhibition to understand how visitors perceive, understand and make meaning from participatory experiences. For decades, scholars have asserted and provided examples of how museum professionals underestimated the abilities and active meaning-making of visitors and incorrectly perceived visitors as passive receivers (Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1992; Tchen 1992; Sandell 1998; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2000; Sandell 2007; Carpentier 2011a; Smith and Campbell 2015). An issue in audience research is that museum professionals and academics assume that they know what visitors do and take away from a museum visit. Lavine (1992) argued that there is a gap between curatorial assumptions of what visitors will do in an exhibition and the actual visitor responses that take place. Sandell (2003) and Duncan (2005) and others (Pierson-Jones 1992; Ross 2004; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Takahisa 2011; Kidd 2014) contended that museum professionals resist cultural change that would open up their practice and relinquish control, such as participation, especially in covert ways. If this is so, this underestimation of visitor expectations and actual experiences could be a method of resistance, not simply one of inexperience or insufficient resources. The *Power of 1* case study is an opportunity to compare and contrast the museum professionals' expectations of visitor engagement against the actual experiences of visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition. Although this chapter will discuss the convergence or disjuncture of the museum professionals' predictions and assessments that were highlighted in Chapter 5, this aspect will be explored more fully in Chapter 8.

6.2 Demographic profile

Museum audiences do not reflect the general demographics of their communities. Even visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition observed that the audience participating in the exhibition were not representative of Australia (F2/P63, F10/P1 and F7/P58). As noted in Chapter 2, various visitor studies (Black 2005; Bounia et al. 2012) in Australia, the US and the UK reported that museums are

typically attended by audiences who are more likely than the general population to earn an above-average household income, be employed and have a tertiary education. This claim is supported by an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) report (ABS 2010) that indicated that as many females as males attended museums, most museum visitors were aged 35–44 years and that visitors who were most likely to attend museums were in full-time employment, held post–high-school qualifications (e.g., diplomas or tertiary qualifications) and were in the highest or second-highest income group. Further, a 2015 Museums and Galleries NSW (MGNSW) report (MGNSW 2015) found that one-third of audiences were likely to be retired, museums found it difficult to attract young adults, half of museum visitors were likely to be first-time visitors and around one-third of visitors attended museums with their children.

Of the 140 people interviewed at MoAD in Canberra, 42.9% (60) were male and 57.1% (80) were female (possibly because women may be more likely to agree to be interviewed). Most of the people interviewed were visiting in a family group (55%) during a school holiday period, which accounts for the large percentage (27.9%) of people under the age of 17 who were interviewed. People 17 years of age and under were interviewed alongside their parents and with their parents' permission, and the occupation listed for people under the age of 17 was their household's primary employment. Table 6.1 illustrates the frequency of age groups within the sample. While most adult visitors were aged over 35 years, this sample shows a higher frequency of visitors aged 34 and under (53.6%) than is reported by the ABS (2010) and other studies (MGNSW 2015).

Table 6.1. Age of participants in the visitor exit interviews.

Age

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Under 17	39	27.9
	35–44	30	21.4
	25–34	20	14.3
	55–65	19	13.6
	18–24	16	11.4
	45–54	10	7.1
	Over 65	6	4.3
	Total	**140**	**100.0**

Visitors were highly educated, with more than half (55.2%) having attained undergraduate or postgraduate university degrees. This is consistent with the typical post–high-school qualification profile of museum audiences (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. Highest educational qualification of the visitor interviewees.

Highest educational qualification			
		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Undergraduate university degree	34	29.8
	Postgraduate university degree	29	25.4
	Trade/technical qualification/apprenticeship	19	16.7
	Year 12 or equivalent	17	14.9
	Year 10 or equivalent	8	7.0
	Year 9 or below	7	6.1
	Total	114	100.0
Missing	Still at school (not offered in interview)	26	
Total		140	

More than half (51.4%) of visitors interviewed were visiting MoAD for the first time (see Table 6.3). Around a third (31.4%) of visitors had visited the venue more than 12 months previously, and many mentioned that their prior visit occurred when Old Parliament House was a working parliament (i.e., before 1988). The remaining 17.1% of visitors had frequented the venue within the previous 12 months.

Table 6.3. First-time or repeat visitors to MoAD.

First-time or repeat visitors to MoAD			
		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	First-time visitor	72	51.4
	Repeat visitor (over 12 months)	44	31.4
	Repeat visitor (within 12 months)	24	17.1
	Total	140	100.0

Only 10 visitors who were interviewed (7.1%) were overseas tourists, the remaining were Australian tourists or local Canberra visitors (see Table 6.4). Interviewees were asked to define, in their own words, their ethnic background or affiliation. Over two-thirds (69.3%) of the interviewed visitors self-identified as being from an Australian or Anglo-Celtic Australian background. This frequency is comparable with other museum studies of visitors (ABS 2010, MGNSW 2015). The descriptors

that amalgamated under 'Anglo-Celt' included simple statements, such as 'Australian', as well as 'Whitebread Anglo', 'White Caucasian', 'WASP', 'Aussie' and 'Convict Australian'. It is noted that an assumption was made about ethnicity when classifying the response 'Australian' into this category, but in general those from dominant ethnic backgrounds were less likely to identify themselves beyond the simple descriptor 'Australian'. More than one in five (22.9%) visitors interviewed identified as being from non–Anglo-Celtic Australian backgrounds and used descriptions such as Italian/Burmese, Australia/Italian, Australia–Croatian, mixed race and Middle Eastern, to name a few. The identifier 'Australian' was not added to interviewees who did not provide a description even though these interviewees lived in Australia. One Indigenous visitor self-identified as an Australian Aboriginal. Ten overseas tourists from six different countries were interviewed, including Germany (4), Holland, Russia, Columbia, North America (2) and India. The descriptor 'tourist' has been added to these international visitor identifiers when quotations from their interviews are provided throughout this thesis.

Table 6.4. Ethnic background or affiliation of the visitor interviewees.

Ethnic background or affiliation

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Australian and/or Anglo-Celtic Australia	97	69.3
	Non–Anglo-Celtic Australia	32	22.9
	Overseas tourist	10	7.1
	Indigenous Australian	1	.7
	Total	140	100.0

The occupations of visitors who were interviewed was categorised using the ABS Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations. Table 6.5 shows that nearly half (42.8%) of the interviewed visitors were professionals, 13% were technicians or trade workers and just over 10% (10.9%) were managers. Other occupations included community and personal service workers (8.7%), machinery operators and drivers (6.5%) and members of the armed forces (2.9%). Only six visitors were retired (4.3%), five visitors (3.6%) were students and four visitors were unemployed (2.9%). Occupation classification was based on the primary earner in each household.

Table 6.5. Occupations of the visitor interviewees.

Occupation

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Professionals	59	42.8
	Technicians and trade workers	18	13.0
	Managers	15	10.9
	Community and personal service workers	12	8.7
	Machinery operators and drivers	9	6.5
	Retired	6	4.3
	Student	5	3.6
	Sales workers	5	3.6
	Armed forces occupations	4	2.9
	Unemployed	4	2.9
	Labourers	1	.7
	Total	138	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	2	
Total		140	

Most visitors interviewed (82.9%) were either Canberra locals or visitors from the nearby states of New South Wales and Victoria (see Table 6.6). This reflects typical tourist patterns for Canberra, in which most (66%) domestic overnight visitors travel up to three hours from the surrounding regions (Tourism Research Australia 2016). A small proportion (7.1%) of the visitors who were interviewed came from overseas, and of this small sample nearly half (four out of 10) were visiting Canberra from Germany.

Table 6.6. Residence (by state/territory) of the visitor interviewees.

Residence

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	NSW	39	27.9
	VIC	39	27.9
	ACT and QBN	38	27.1
	Overseas	10	7.1
	QLD	6	4.3
	WA	5	3.6
	NT	2	1.4
	TAS	1	.7
	Total	140	100.0

6.3 Reason for visit (closed question)

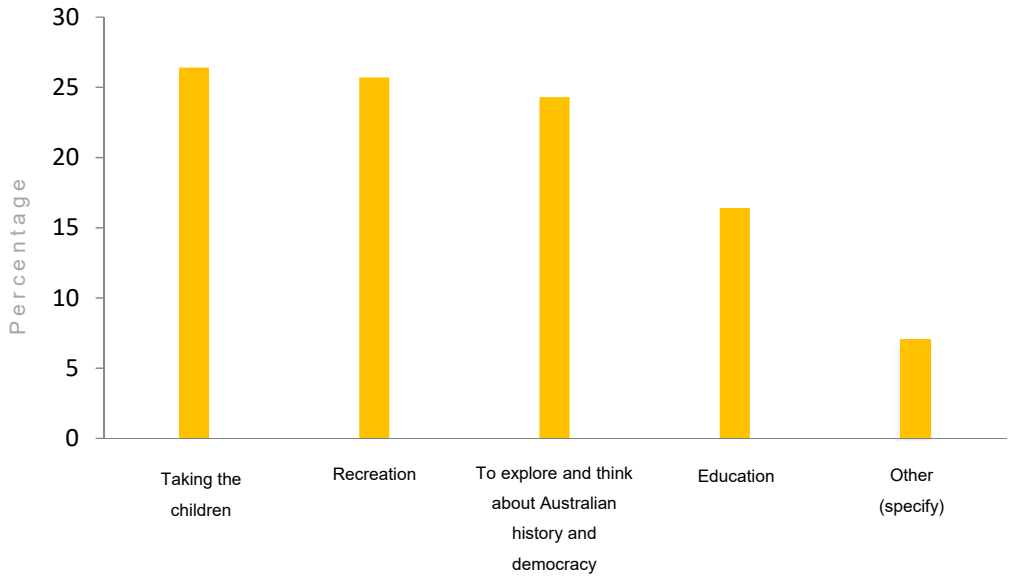


Figure 6.1: Visitor interviewees' reasons for their visit to Old Parliament House.

Figure 6.1 highlights the reasons visitors gave for visiting Old Parliament House, including to take their children out for the day (26.4%), recreation (25.7%) and to explore and think about Australian history and democracy (24.3%) (see Table 6.7). Education was only the fourth most frequent reason (16.4%) given for visiting Old Parliament House. These findings support the work of S. Macdonald (1990), Sandell (2002a) and Smith (2015) to challenge the dominant learning paradigm (Falk and Dierking 1992, 2000, 2016), and confirms that while education is one of the reasons people visit museums, it is not the main or only reason.

Table 6.7. Overall reason for visiting MoAD at Old Parliament House.

Overall reason for visiting MoAD

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Taking the children	37	26.4
	Recreation	36	25.7
	To explore and think about Australian history and democracy	34	24.3
	Education	23	16.4
	Other (specify)	10	7.1
	Total	140	100.0

6.4 Open-ended questions

6.4.1 Q1. Why did you visit the *Power of 1* exhibition today?

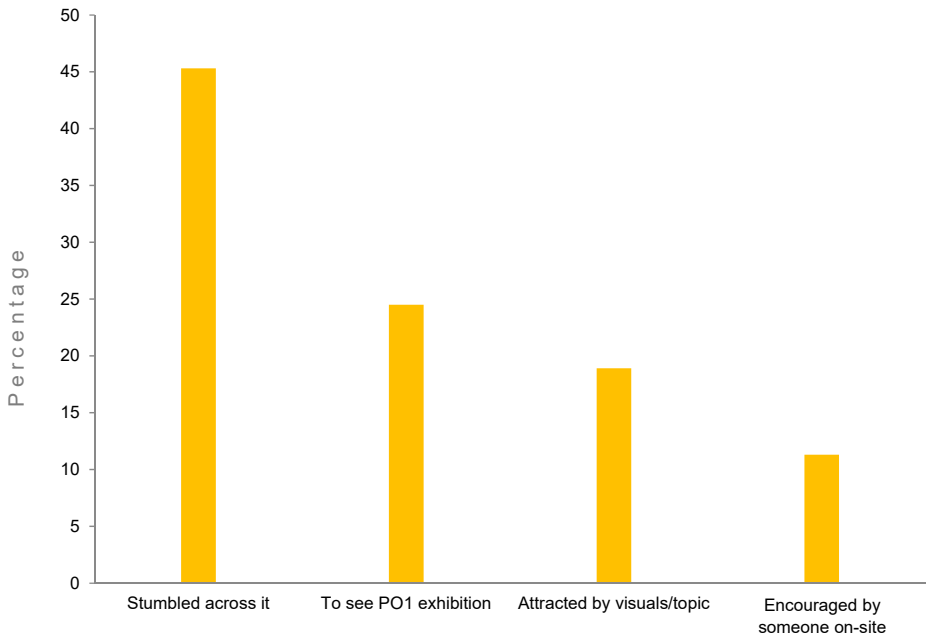


Figure 6.2: Visitor interviewees' reasons for visiting the Power of 1 exhibition.

The most frequent response (45.3%) that visitors gave when asked why they visited the *Power of 1* exhibition was that they had stumbled across it during a visit to MoAD at Old Parliament House (see Figure 6.2 and Table 6.8). Only a quarter (24.5%) of people surveyed came specifically to visit the exhibition, while 18.9% of visitors interviewed said that they had been attracted by the visuals at the exhibition's entry, usually mentioning the artist installation of shoes. Most participants had not heard of the exhibition prior to their visit; as a result, they had little awareness or expectations with which to frame their visit. The high 'did not ask' response that is listed in Table 6.8 is because most of the visitors interviewed for the study were invited in to see the exhibition by the researcher. The lack of signage, external marketing and on-site promotion of the *Power of 1* exhibition (noted in Chapter 3) resulted in most visitors needing encouragement to enter the exhibition. The researcher typically asked, 'Have you seen the *Power of 1* exhibition?' This attracted visitors' attention to the exhibition and away from the historic House of Representatives Chamber that was visible to the visitors. Of those visitors who were asked this question, 4.9% stated they had been encouraged by someone on-site (beyond the researcher, usually a visitor services assistant) to attend. When the researcher encouraged visitors to attend the exhibition, question 1 was not asked.

Table 6.8. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Why did you visit the Power of 1 exhibition today?'

Q1. Why did you visit the *Power of 1* exhibition today?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Stumbled across it	24	45.3
	To see *Power of 1* exhibition	13	24.5
	Attracted by visuals/topic	10	18.9
	Encouraged by someone on-site	6	11.3
	Total	53	100.0
Missing	Did not ask	87	
Total		140	

6.4.2 Q2. Is the *Power of 1* a different kind of museum experience?

This question aimed to reveal whether visitors perceived that they were experiencing something different from a traditional museum experience in the *Power of 1,* an exhibition that was intended to be experimental and participatory. Almost all visitors (98.1%) stated that the *Power of 1* exhibition was a different experience, and the small number of visitors who disagreed (1.9%) stated that the exhibition was not different because interactivity is common in today's museums (see Table 6.9).

Interactivity and being able to 'have your say' were given as the most frequent reasons (50.5% combined total) for the *Power of 1* being perceived as a different experience. Unexpectedly, many interviewees gave answers to this question that revealed negative perceptions of traditional museum experiences, including using the word 'just' to precede descriptions of traditional museum experiences in a similar way to the museum professionals in Chapter 5. According to visitors, traditional museum experiences were perceived as passive, didactic (or one-way), rule-bound and not for young people. Visitors also thought that they did not 'make you think'. (Note that some of these negative perceptions about traditional museum experiences echoed the sentiments expressed by the museum professionals in Chapter 5.) The statements relevant to these negative perceptions are italicised throughout this chapter. For example, of the 50.5% of respondents who cited interactivity, more than half of these respondents took the opportunity to express negative perceptions of traditional museum experiences. For example:

> P1: Yes, it is. It's very specifically oriented towards getting feedback, *rather than presenting information, so in that sense it's not didactic*, it's not trying to teach you stuff. It's asking you to put forward your own opinions about some important issues.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P48: Yes, I think it's quite interactive, which is really good. And it raises a lot of questions that we need to think about within society today. So, I think from that perspective, it *makes you think, rather than just being a visual display*.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P57: And it's not *just* pressing buttons and getting answers. It's actually contributing to something, which is exciting.
> *Female, aged 25–34, student, Sri Lankan*

> P99: Yeah, it's nothing we've really seen before. You could touch stuff. You could have your own say and write stuff. It was really interesting seeing what other people have done.
> *Female, aged 18–24, retail, Australian*

The highly visual presentation and generations-based interpretive approach was given as the next most frequent response (28.2%) as to whether the *Power of 1* was a different kind of museum experience. Some of the respondents who noted this difference also took the opportunity to reflect negatively on traditional museum experiences; however, the proportion was much smaller than those who commented on the interactivity. For instance:

> P114: Yes, it had the generations divided. That was interesting because I walked past the boomers and said 'yes'! And he walked past the [gen] Xers and said 'yes'. But I was more comfortable with the builders, though.
> P113: But it's all open to interpretation, how you see each room. There's not a set '*this is what you've got to think in this room*'. You walk in and go 'hmm'.
> P114: My favourite was the builders.
> P113: I think the iPhones hanging from the roof [gen Y] was good.
> P114: You would.
> P113: I think it sucks but it's very gen Y isn't it?
> *RC: So you liked the visual experience?*
> P114: Yes.
> P113: We spent the most time in the Builders Room, reading the papers [visitors' contributions] where they're writing stuff.
> P114: It's interesting.
> *Female, aged 55–64, nurse, Anglo (P114) in conversation with male, aged 35–44, unemployed, Anglo (P113)*

> P116: Yes, because you don't see shoes on the walls. And you don't see hanging iPhones from the ceilings. It's just completely different from what you usually see in museums. [This is a young boy aged around 12 years who answered the question very confidently.]
> P115: And you don't usually see, um, voting things where, um, like, where you can tell you what you think.
> P117: It's quite hands-on, which you do find you get a lot in Canberra ... a lot more hands-on type of museum. *But [this is] yeah, getting you to think, which is good.*
> *Male, aged under 17, Anglo (P116) in conversation with female, aged under 17, Anglo (P115) and female, aged 35–44, technician, Anglo (P117)*

The reason given least frequently as to how the exhibition was different was that it appealed to different ages (2.9%). For P26, the *Power of 1* was 'unique' because, through the generation rooms, it 'caters to the broad range of interests', which appealed to the different ages in her group and provoked memories and conversations about the experiences of her parents, children and own

childhood. This approach provided P26 with a way to better understand Australia's democratic history:

> P26: And I think the little summaries in each room, I actually went back a second time and read them. And you actually notice how our views of democracy and what we in life have evolved and changed. That was quite interesting, looking at the last 50 or 60 years.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

The most surprising finding from this question was the widespread negative views of traditional museum experiences as passive, static, lacking stimulation and unable to cater for different age groups and interests. Further, as P117 suggested, traditional museum experiences do not offer opportunities that make people think. Without being asked a specific question to this effect, visitors freely offered their views about conventional museum experiences. These visitors argued that participatory exhibitions, such as the *Power of 1*, made them think (P48, P119), and visitors appreciated being able to contribute or put forward opinions (P1, P57, P113, P115) or see other visitors' opinions (P99, P113) about important issues (P1, P48). This will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

Table 6.9. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Is the Power of 1 a different museum experience?'

Q2. Is it a different museum experience?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Yes, interactive	34	33.0
	Yes, visual presentation (including generations)	29	28.2
	Yes, interactive + negative reflection on traditional museum experience	18	17.5
	Yes, no reason	10	9.7
	Yes, visual presentation + negative reflection on traditional museum experience	4	3.9
	Yes, makes you think/more engaging	3	2.9
	Yes, appeals to different learners and ages	3	2.9
	No, interactivity is common in museums	2	1.9
	Total	103	100.0
Missing	Did not ask	37	
Total		140	

6.4.3 Q3. Did you participate in any of the interactives?

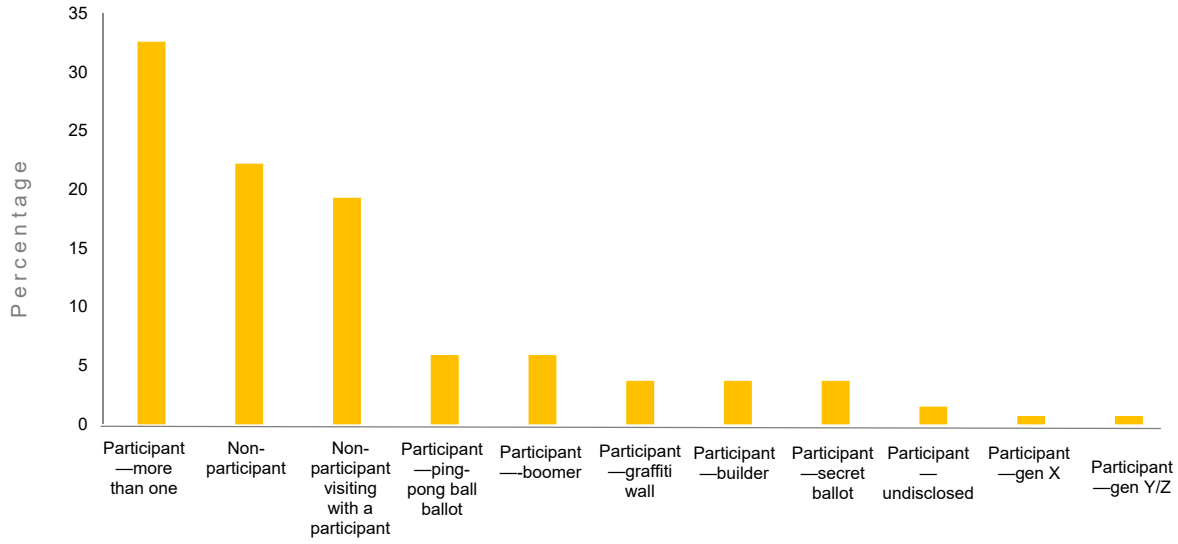


Figure 6.3: Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Did you participate in any of the interactives?'

Most visitors interviewed (58.4%) participated in the exhibition by leaving a contribution (i.e., written, audio or video) or casting a vote (see Figure 6.3 and Table 6.10). Of this proportion, 56% (44) took part in more than one of the activities presented in the *Power of 1* exhibition:

> P117: We did. Just in the Tally Room.
> P118: The secret ballot.
> P115 and P116: And the ping-pong one.
> P117: And the ping-pong one.
> *RC: So what attracted you to writing in the secret ballot?*
> P118: It's more of a demonstration to the children of what the secret ballot was, how the system works.
> P117: But also a good way for us—and for the kids too—to think about those questions ...
> *Female, aged 35–44, technician, Anglo (P117)*
> *in conversation with male, aged 35–44, technician, Anglo (P118)*
> *accompanied by their two children, aged under 17 (a girl P115 and a boy P116)*

Less than half (41.5%) of interviewees indicated that they did not participate in the exhibition by physically leaving a contribution or voting. Of the total non-participating visitors interviewed (56), nearly half (46%) stated that they had visited with someone who had participated. For example:

> P88: I didn't do them. I was looking at them. To be fair, I told you what to write on the wall. I couldn't reach that high.
> P89: No, we just read them and read all the walls and stuff. Shane (P90) wrote the messages because he was tall enough.
> *Female, aged 35–44, aged care/disability care, Aussie (P88)*
> *and female, aged 35–44, aged care/disability care, Aussie (P89)*

Although these visitors had not chosen to leave a comment or vote, they had experienced participation by discussing answers with their group and reflecting on the visitors' contributions.

This demonstrates that participation can have a wider definition than simply including those visitors who left a tangible or digital contribution. This was suggested by several of the museum professionals, in particular the external contractors and will be further explored in Chapter 8.

Table 6.10. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Did you participate in any of the interactives?'

Q3. Did you participate in any of the interactives?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Participant—more than one	44	32.6
	Non-participant	30	22.2
	Non-participant visiting with a participant	26	19.3
	Participant—ping-pong ballot	8	5.9
	Participant—boomer	8	5.9
	Participant—graffiti wall	5	3.7
	Participant—builder	5	3.7
	Participant—secret ballot	5	3.7
	Participant—undisclosed	2	1.5
	Participant—gen X	1	.7
	Participant—gen Y/Z	1	.7
	Total	135	100.0
Missing	Did not ask	5	
Total		140	

6.4.4 Q4. How did you feel when you participated in those interactives?

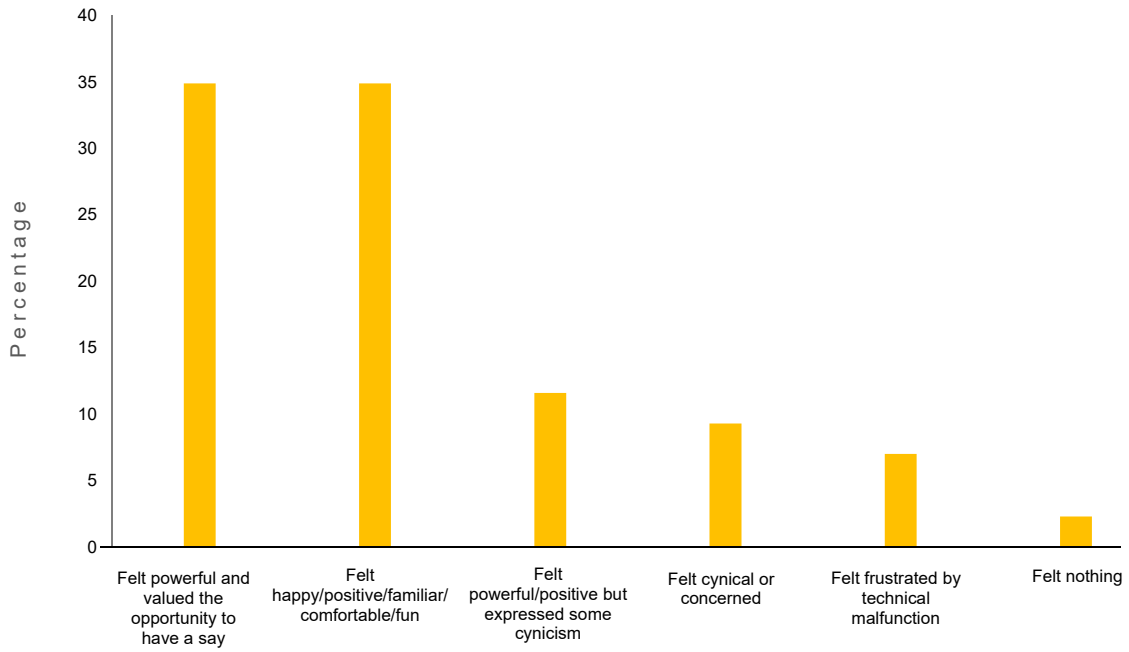


Figure 6.4: Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'How did you feel when you participated in those interactives?'

Follow-up questions 4, 5 and 6 were asked of participants who provided an affirmative answer to question 3, 'Did you participate in any of the interactives?' For a few reasons, these questions were mostly not asked over the course of the fieldwork: they were not relevant to non-participants, the researcher sometimes overlooked them, they felt gratuitous or repetitive based on the visitors' previous answers and sometimes visitors wanted to keep the interview brief and move on to the next exhibit or finish their visit. As such, these questions consist of smaller sample sizes and the frequencies and percentages are less reliable. However, the comments from the visitors who did answer these questions were often insightful and pertinent to the study and, thus, are included in this thesis.

Interviewees responded positively when asked how they felt when they participated in the interactives, saying they felt powerful and valued the opportunity to have their say (34.9%) or felt happy or other similar positive sentiments (34.9%) (see Figure 6.4 and Table 6.11). The feeling of having agency and feeling powerful as a result of having their say in a museum was strong among interviewees across different age categories, occupations and education levels:

> P1: Well, it gives you a little frisson of 'yes, I want to say that', doesn't it? I got to say the biggest problem with Australian democracy is that we got to vote for Tony Abbott. It gives you that tiny sense of satisfaction, that little moment of something coming on in your brain that says 'yes'.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P26: I actually found it quite powerful, writing in big letters on a wall. I wrote something about equality and being a democracy and that it's so important. Just writing it in big letters was just so empowering, that someone would walk in and see that message that I'd written. So I quite liked that because you wouldn't do that normally. You know, writing on walls, especially in a heritage building. To be given that freedom to do that was quite empowering.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

> P116: I just felt good because instead of needing to be 18 above, I got a chance to choose what I want.
> *RC: How old are you (to P116)?*
> P116: I'm 11.
> *RC: How old are you [to P115]?*
> P115: I'm eight.
> *RC: How did you feel?*
> P115: I felt like a part of everyone else because it's not like we're voting, but it's like we're getting a say and stuff.
> *Male, aged under 17, Anglo (P116)*
> *and female, aged under 17, Anglo (P115), household occupation technician*

P26's comment that she was empowered by the idea that someone would see her comment about a topic that was important to her echoed M9 and M7's comments that visitors wanted their contributions to be visible in the museum (see Chapter 5). Note also how P115 and P116, who were eight and 11 years old, respectively, felt empowered and included through the opportunity to

make a choice and have a say in a museum environment—the engagement of young people at MoAD was a goal for the museum director.

A small number of visitors said they felt frustrated because the participatory activity did not work, in particular the digital interactives that were often frozen or not uploading material. People were also disappointed when, for instance, the ping-pong balls had run out and they could not vote. This shows the importance of maintenance and ongoing support for participatory exhibitions and validates the comments and concerns made by internal museum staff during the museum professionals' interviews about participatory exhibition's demands on resources (see Chapter 5).

Just over one in 10 visitors (11.6%) who answered this question expressed cynicism about the invitation to participate and have their say even if they found the experience a positive one. This was the first example of visitors assuming or asking if their comments about democracy and Australian politics and politicians were going to be forwarded to politicians or other decision-makers. In total, 29 individual interviewees (20.7%) across the 16 interview questions asked if the visitors' contributions to the *Power of 1* would be forwarded to decision-makers, often politicians. These responses recurred throughout the interviews and became more specific, and were not anticipated by anyone on the development team (including the researcher). No-one ever conceived that the influence of the *Power of 1* could expand beyond the institution's walls. Many visitors, however, saw the potential for the museum to affect change and make a difference. Comments made by P71 (below) are just some of the multiple examples of the visitors' expectations or assumptions that the comments they wrote or read would be forwarded to politicians or other decision-makers. This could have been because they were participating in the Old Parliament House building. As further discussed in Chapter 8, visitors perceived that the exhibition experience was a legitimate forum—a 'public sphere'—for canvassing and capturing citizens' views about politics, democracy and current affairs, and became a continuing theme as illustrated by these comments:

> P71: I thought, 'Well, what's going to happen to this if I put this information out there?' Because if it actually does make a difference, then that would be a good thing but if it's just going to go back into the file somewhere ... I was curious about where it was going to end up.
> *Female, aged 45–54, public servant, mixed race*

> P117: Part of you sort of does the whole, 'You know, I'm doing this for nothing', as from the point of view where no-one is going to read these and, you know, it's not like the comments that you make will go anywhere. But then on the flip side, as I said, it certainly got us talking about a lot of things.
> *Female, aged 35–44, technician, Anglo*

The cynicism expressed by P117 reflects the feelings of powerlessness towards politics and politicians in Australia (Evans, Halupka and Stoker 2014; IGPA 2014), and demonstrates the need

for museum participatory experiences to avoid token participation (Pateman 1976) and include a response mechanism within the museum experience to encourage participation as outlined in the CLEAR framework (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2006).

Table 6.11. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'How did you feel when you participated in those interactives?'

Q4 How did you feel when you participated in those interactives?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Felt powerful and valued the opportunity to have a say	15	34.9
	Felt happy/positive/familiar/comfortable/fun/satisfying	15	34.9
	Felt powerful/positive but expressed some cynicism	5	11.6
	Felt cynical or concerned	4	9.3
	Felt frustrated by technical malfunction	3	7.0
	Felt nothing	1	2.3
	Total	43	100.0
Missing	Did not ask	97	
Total		140	

6.4.5 Q5. Which interactives did you most enjoy?

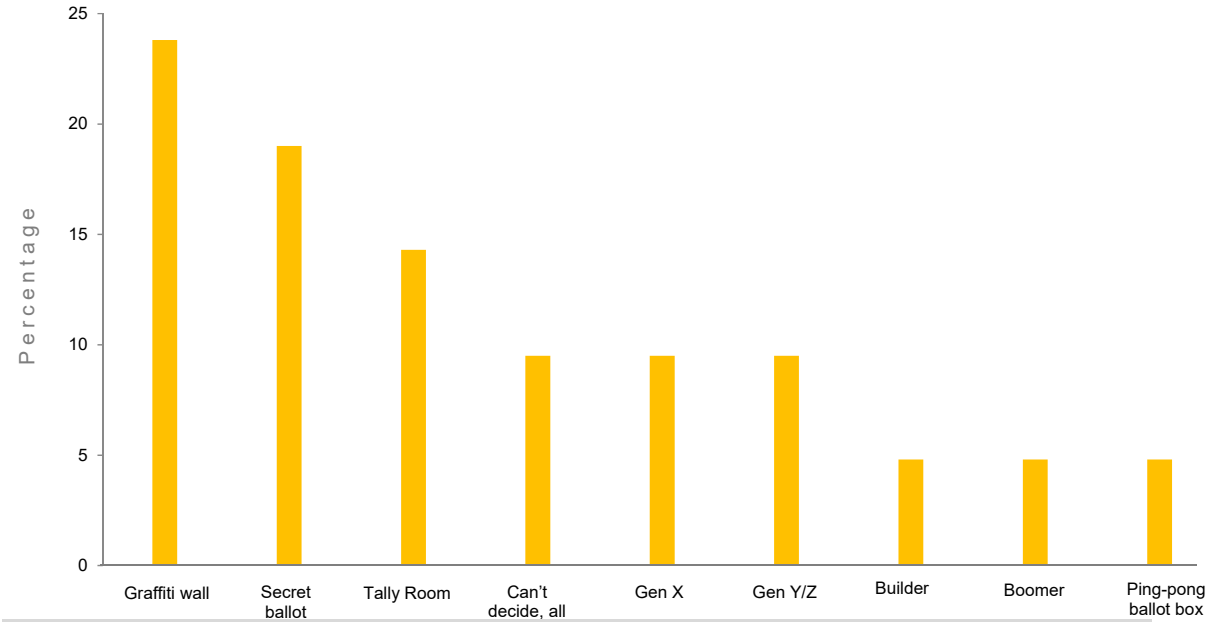


Figure 6.5: Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Which interactives did you most enjoy?'

Of those who answered this question, the most popular interactives identified were the graffiti wall (23.8%), the secret ballot (19%) and the Tally Room (14.3%), which incorporated the graffiti wall, secret ballot, message tree and the ping-pong ballot box (see Figure 6.5 and Table 6.12). Visitors across all age groups indicated that participation was an enjoyable experience and reflected on the

different attributes of each of the activities and why they appealed to them. Appealing attributes included being able to write something down (that someone could see), leaving a private message, having fun, reading other people's comments, ease of use and the potential to influence change as highlighted by the visitors' quotes below:

> P116: The ping-pong, it's really clever how they did it. Instead of just writing it and putting the note in it, they thought about it to make it a bit fun so got ping-pong balls and put them there.
> *Male, aged under 17, household occupation technician, Anglo*

> P97: The writing, the last one.
> P98: The one with 'I would fight' [secret ballot].
> RC: What did you like about it?
> P97: Maybe someone can read everything.
> P98: Maybe it's bringing a change.
> P97: Yeah, in the future maybe.
> *RC: Did you like that you could answer that in the little booth?*
> P98: Yes, private. Because if you write something you don't always know how other people think about it. Sometimes, if you have a different opinion it can get difficult. You can say more if you are private and not always watching over your shoulder.
> *Male, aged 18–24, manufacturing, German tourist (P97)*
> *and female, aged 18–24, manufacturing, Columbian tourist (P98)*

> P3: The end room [the Tally Room] where you get to read what other people say. It's fascinating.
> *Male, aged 25–34, scientist, Australian*

> P112: Probably the secret ballot one because it the invitation [the provocation, 'I'd fight for my right to'] was for something that you could feel passionate about. So there was a freedom to write whatever you wanted, whereas the boomer one at the beginning, I'm just trying to think about how the question was phrased, 'What do you like about Australian democracy?' I had to struggle to think about what that was. But you know when you're asked to fight for something [secret ballot] you reflect on something that is immediate and personal to you, so it was easy to write something on there.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Australian English*

> P142: It's hard to say. There were three that I will count as equivalent. I liked the builders because I could write and express something that I felt would possibly be used later, hopefully … in making political assessments. And, similarly, also I think in the Tally Room, some of the stuff that I wrote there was to try to leave something so that others will read it and perhaps think about it. And then when it came to the gen Y one, again I recorded something that I hope will make the people stop and think.
> *Male, aged 45–54, doctor, Caucasian*

> P1: Well, it was the one appropriate to my age group [the Boomer Room audio recording], strangely enough. There was a little bit of nostalgia in there. It was interesting given Gough [Whitlam's] recent demise that I'd been thinking back to the politics of that era recently, and it's quite foundational in terms of our generation's lives but also to Australian politics. So I was reliving some of the anger and the frustration, but also the hope that was kindled at that time so it was nice.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

To compensate for question 5's low respondent sample size, data were gathered and analysed from the transcripts of all visitors' interviews to determine which participatory activities were most used

in the exhibition and provide an understanding of the popularity of each participatory activity. Multiple activities were allowed. Listed from the most popular, the most frequently mentioned participatory activities by visitors were:

1. ping-pong ball ballot box (i.e., tangible, structured, self-directed and public)
2. secret ballot (i.e., tangible, open-ended—but could run out of space, self-directed and anonymous—completed in a private voting booth and staff installed the cards for display)
3. graffiti wall (i.e., tangible, structured—limited by space available, self-directed and public—a large-scale performative act to contribute to this wall)
4. Builder Room (i.e., tangible—with digital upload element, open-ended, self-directed and anonymous).

Listed with the least popular activity last, the least frequently mentioned participatory activities by visitors were:

1. Gen X Room (i.e., structured—maximum 126 characters, self-directed and anonymous)
2. Gen Y/Z Room (i.e., digital, unstructured but with a six-second time limit, self-directed and public)
3. message tree (i.e., tangible, open-ended—but could run out of space, self-directed and public but could be completely discretely)
4. Boomer Room (i.e., digital, structured—maximum six seconds, self-directed and anonymous—voice recorded).

These findings complicate the view of digital technologies as inevitably and intrinsically beneficial for participation. Most visitors preferred the tangible participatory activities, such as voting with a ball or writing on a wall, ballot or piece of paper. Although the lack of popularity of the digital participatory activities might be explained by the technology maintenance issues, which was expressed as a frustration in question 4 and as suggested improvements in question 6, this question shows that visitors liked to participate. Further, tangible participation was accessed by more visitors. This will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Table 6.12. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Which interactives did you most enjoy?'

Q5. Which interactives did you most enjoy?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Graffiti wall	5	23.8
	Secret ballot	4	19.0
	Tally Room	3	14.3
	Can't decide, all	2	9.5
	Gen X	2	9.5
	Gen Y/Z	2	9.5
	Builder	1	4.8
	Boomer	1	4.8
	Ping-pong ballot box	1	4.8
	Total	21	100.0
Missing	Did not ask	119	
Total		140	

6.4.6 Q6. Do you think there is any way the interactives could be improved?

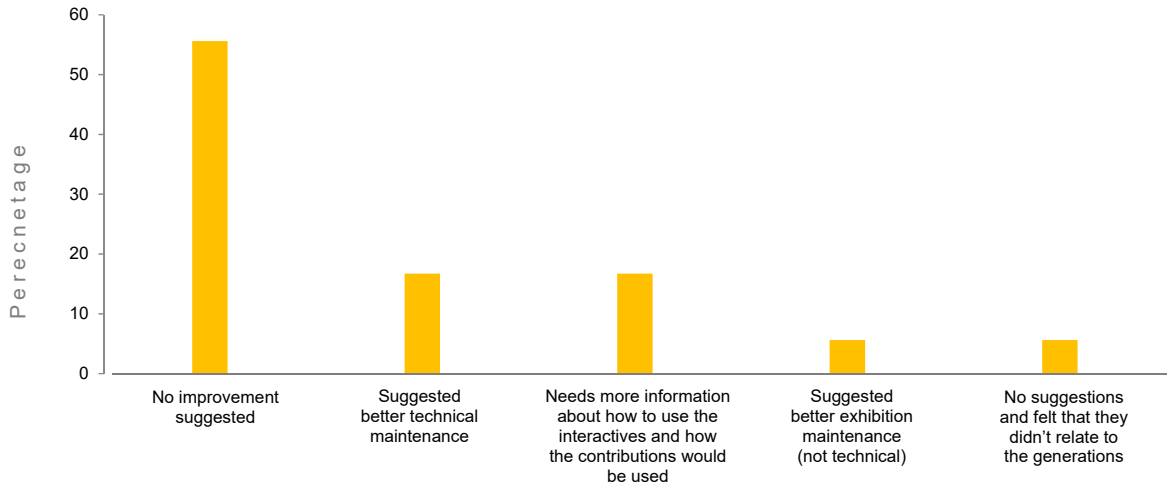


Figure 6.6: Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Do you think there is any way the interactives could be improved?'

Figure 6.6 and Table 6.13 show that very few improvements were suggested by visitors; however, improved exhibition maintenance, especially of the technical/digital interactives was raised by visitors in their answers to this question and throughout their interviews:

> P1L: It doesn't explain very clearly what happens. And in the baby boomers, the red light, you're meant to speak when the red light was flashing but, um, when it went off you only had about five seconds to record your message. It should say how long you've got to record.
> *Male, aged over 65, retired public servant, WASP*

> P112: Functionality on the [gen X] Commodore [64] one. It was very frustrating being locked into a mode of thing, whether it was written or video, rather than having that freedom of choice probably limits how many people answer those questions. I think people usually have a preferred mode that they would like to be in and most people are probably more comfortable with a written thing because it doesn't impinge on other people who are in the room.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Australian English*

> P142: Yeah, the IT maintenance has been awful. Things just didn't work. Some of them did work, mostly. I found, I must admit I found myself, when I got into the Gen Y Room, the fact that I'm a baby boomer, I felt I didn't fit in that room. Gen X was about as far as I got and felt comfortable, and I found that was interesting. That was more a reflection on myself, because I know that anyone 10 years younger than me would have just gone into the Y room and felt quite at home there.
> *Male, aged 45–54, doctor, Caucasian*

One visitor suggested that more information was needed to explain the project and how the content should be used:

> P3L: I don't know. I think if you had a little bit more information about the way they've gathered that information, um, and with the survey when they presented that information afterwards, like, I had a little bit of trouble reading it sometimes. Um, I would have enjoyed reading a little bit more about why they're running the project maybe and what they're hoping for.
> *Female, aged 25–34, teacher, Canadian*

P3L's comments reflect those of other visitors who judged the success of the project based on whether the information gathered was to be forwarded to decision-makers or politicians. The complaints about the digital experiences demonstrate that if digital participatory experiences are offered then visitors demand they should be user-friendly, well-maintained and working. While additional time in the exhibition development phase could have resolved some of the problems with the digital interactives through increased testing and refining of functionality, the visitors' complaints support M1's comments (see Chapter 5) that MoAD needed to 'reframe' and more realistically fund their engagement model to support a '24/7' interactive platform.

Table 6.13. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Do you think there is any way the interactives could be improved?'

Q6. Do you think there is any way the interactives could be improved?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	No improvement suggested	10	55.6
	Suggested better technical maintenance	3	16.7
	Needs more information about how to use the interactives and how the contributions would be used	3	16.7
	Suggested better exhibition maintenance (not technical)	1	5.6
	No suggestions and felt that they didn't relate to the generations	1	5.6
	Total	18	100.0
Missing	Did not ask	122	
Total		140	

6.4.7 Q7. Why didn't you participate [question asked to non-participants]?

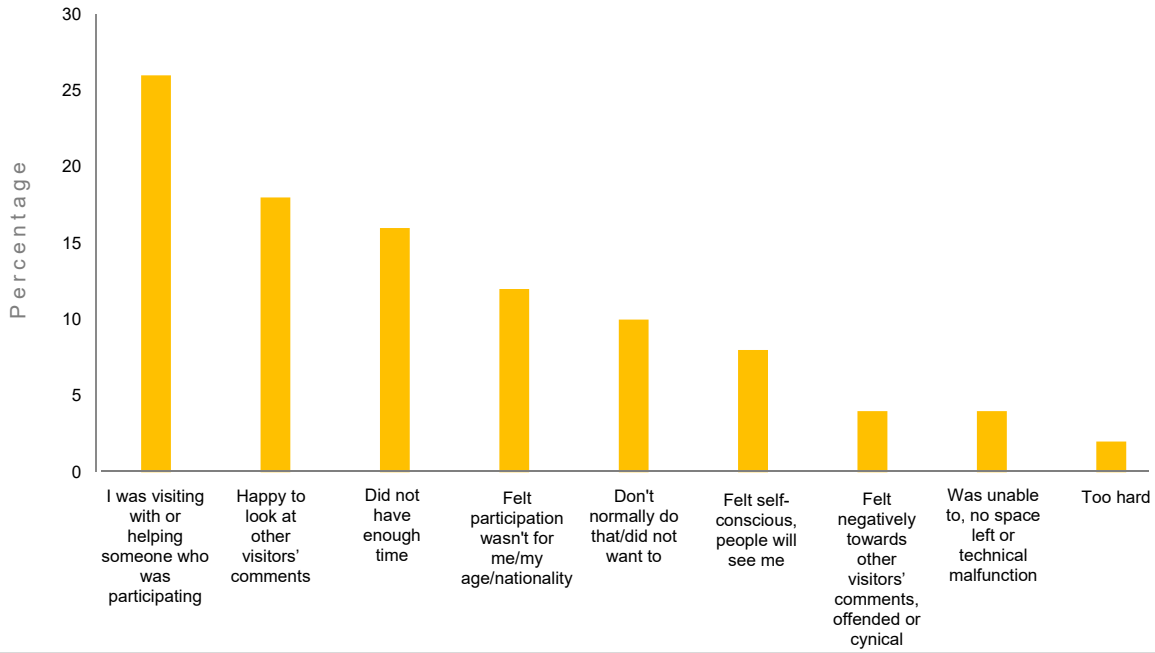


Figure 6.7: Non-participating visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Why didn't you participate?'

In question 3, it was established that 41.5% of interviewees (53) did not participate in the exhibition by leaving a comment, contribution or vote. These visitors were asked why they did not participate (see Figure 6.7 and Table 6.14). The most frequent (26%) explanation given was that the non-participants were visiting with someone who chose to participate and, therefore, did not need to participate or chose to help the person who was participating. Below are some of the visitors' comments that demonstrate this:

> P44: I don't tend to do that. I just tend to go round and watch what these guys are doing. I did read what people had written, the other comments.
> *Female, aged 35–44, trade, Anglo visiting with her husband and three children*

> P67: I was just there for him, to direct him.
> *Female, aged 55–64, teacher, Anglo, visiting with her grandson*

> P1L: Because Kim (P2L) was doing it all, that was enough for me.
> *Male, aged over 65, retired public servant, WASP visiting with a friend*

Some visitors (10%) answered that they did not 'see' themselves as people who would participate. For example, one visitor described himself and his wife as 'not the sort of people that tend to leave a footprint' (P72: male, aged 35–44, defence public servant, white Caucasian). This self-consciousness was further expressed when visitors explained that they did not want someone to observe them participating or have their face or voice recorded (8%). Some of these barriers may have been created by the rules within museums that insist that visitors do not touch (Stapp 1992; Bennett 1995; Merriman 2016). Others might have originated from social expectations about whether it is appropriate to express an opinion in public, such as privacy concerns or simple shyness. One interviewee who participated in the ping-pong ball ballot box elaborated on her reasons for not participating in other activities. To overcome barriers that could inhibit a shift to a more participatory, open and inclusive museum environment, these reasons should be understood by museum professionals:

> P48: Young people today are very interactive. To that extent the Generation Y Room was quite confronting, I thought, in terms of having just the iPods and nothing else. And I didn't feel that I could go up and touch them because I thought, 'What if you break it?' You don't want to sort of ... I think there is a generational barrier to going up and interacting with that level of technology. You think it's private, somebody else's or whatever it is. Whereas the other ones, the builders, the boomers and the Xers (which is what I am) it was already there. It didn't feel like you had to actually go and physically engage with it. You could just absorb what was in the room. It's also a privacy thing, you don't touch somebody else's iPod or phone or whatever it was. Although it's in a public space, I found it confronting.
> *RC: Interesting. And I guess part of the language of museums is usually you don't touch. So how did you find in this exhibition where you were allowed to touch?*
> P48: I think you are brought up, especially in my age group, not to touch things. There are usually big signs saying it. So I think to break down the barrier to be more interactive in that way, of actually being tactile with the equipment, maybe that is something that put me off in terms of why I didn't engage with it more.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P22: Yeah, I wouldn't write. It's not hidden at all. Somebody is actually there to watch you. Yeah, and probably, I don't know, growing up, you're not allowed to write on walls and you're always taught to think it not to say it.
> *Male, aged 25–34, carpenter, Aussie*

During the museum professionals' interviews, internal MoAD staff asserted that privacy was a concern for some visitors, in particular younger visitors (M10). These visitors' comments confirm that privacy was a concern for some, but it was a small proportion (8%) and applied to several age

groups and not only young people. A more common explanation (for 18% of interviewees) for not participating among visitors was that that they were just happy to peruse other visitors' comments. This shows the importance of the process of participation—not just the product—to the museum experience, as advocated by external contractor M2 in the professionals' interviews. In fact, as will be shown in later questions, non-participants enjoyed the experience even though they did not personally leave a comment. Some visitors (16%) simply ran out of time, which might have been because most of the interviewees had not planned to visit *Power of 1* until encouraged by the researcher, and some of these interviewees regretted that they had not contributed:

> P104: Because my question was, 'What was your experience of democracy?' And I thought that was too much thinking! It was an involved question ... I feel like going back now because I have an answer now. One of the themes is 'is there power in one voice' and I think the answer is yes, they do count.
> *Female, aged 35–44, student, Swiss*

Other visitors (14%) felt that participation was not 'for' them because they were too old or from overseas:

> P76: Regarding the participation and why I did not do it, maybe because I was born and bred overseas, where it's our [Middle Eastern] culture not to say anything. It's not part of me. That's what I do, I always discuss with them [daughters] and give them a voice, give them an idea. In a way I'm living through them.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

A small number (2) of visitors chose not to participate because other visitors' comments had made them angry or cynical. For example, P39 explained that the comments made him 'angry', 'uncomfortable' and 'unimpressed' (male, aged 55–64, dole, Anglo). P138 could not explain why he did not participate, stating, 'I'm not really sure. I was just wandering around. I was kind of thinking 'oh yeah' (laughs), that kind of thing. I was feeling a bit cynical, I think' (male, aged 45–54, health care, Anglo Saxon).

As suggested by the external museum partners, the responses to question 7 show that attitudes or 'willingness to have a go' (M2) influenced the likelihood of visitors participating in an interactive experience. Demographics or age had less of an influence than was predicted by some museum professionals and both participants and non-participants were represented across all age groups, occupations and educational qualifications. The claim (by M9) that older people found it harder to participate because technology defeated them is hard to substantiate. There are examples throughout the responses of visitors across all age groups of technological failure but this could be partly related to poor maintenance. Some visitors from older age groups acknowledged that they were less comfortable with technology, such as the iPods and the act of taking a 'selfie', and this is an area that could benefit from further research with a larger sample size of older visitors. Visitors chose not to participate when they were visiting with someone who was participating, preferred to

read other contributions, ran out of time to participate or did not feel comfortable leaving a comment or contribution in the museum because of self-consciousness or a feeling that it was not for them. Cynicism or anger was a factor for only two of the interviewees and one of these visitors (P39) had expressed strong discomfort with the exhibition content, which is discussed below. The suggestion by M7 and M9 that visitors would only participate if they could 'leave their mark' could not be evaluated because there were no such comments from visitors about the audio participation (as identified by M9) and most of the participatory interactives in *Power of 1* were highly visible.

Table 6.14. Non-participating visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Why didn't you participate?'

Q7. Why didn't you participate (for non-participants)?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	I was visiting with or helping someone who was participating	13	26.0
	Happy to look at other visitors' comments	9	18.0
	Did not have enough time	8	16.0
	Felt participation wasn't for me/my age/nationality	6	12.0
	Don't normally do that/did not want to	5	10.0
	Felt self-conscious, people will see me	4	8.0
	Felt negatively towards other visitor comments, offended or cynical	2	4.0
	Was unable to, no space left or technical malfunction	2	4.0
	Too hard	1	2.0
	Total	50	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	90	
Total		140	

6.4.8 Q8. Did you read or review other visitors' contributions?

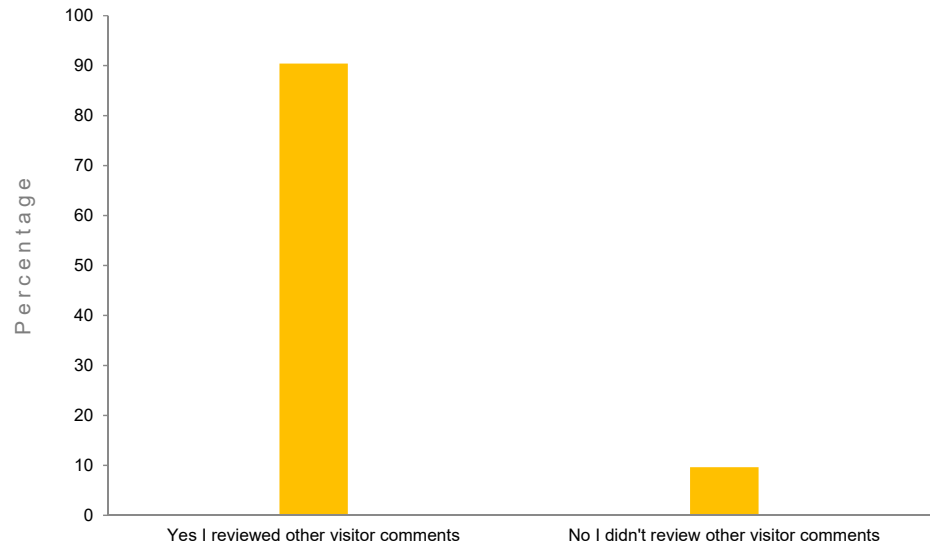


Figure 6.8: Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Did you read or review other visitors' contributions?'

Most interviewees (90.4%) had read or reviewed other visitors' contributions during their visit to the *Power of 1* exhibition, which is not surprising because the visitors' comments were highly visible and represented a large proportion of the overall content (see Figure 6.8 and Table 6.15). The content of what visitors read and how it made them feel is discussed in question 9. Less than one in 10 (9.6%) interviewees stated that they had not read other visitors' comments; however, many of these same visitors referred to a visitor comment they had observed in the exhibition later in their interview. This contradiction might suggest the interviewee had not understood the question, as illustrated in the interview with P41:

> *RC: Did you read or review other visitors' contributions?*
> P41: No, Katie wanted to but I said, 'No we haven't got time' … [later in interview] we spent about 15 minutes reading the messages on the Christmas [message] tree. There was one there about hopefully Bishop doesn't kick Santa out. The comments were really clever. I think that reading what people have to think and say is really good.
> *Female, aged 55–64, solicitor, Anglo*

The contradiction might also illustrate that the interviewee was uncomfortable with the critical, progressive or flippant nature of some of the visitors' comments that may have conflicted with conservative views. Throughout her interview, P53 avoided talking about the other visitors' responses but eventually acknowledged her discomfort with the criticisms of Abbott:

> *RC: Did you read or review other visitors' contributions [to the mother]?*
> P53: No, not me, no.
> *RC: [Q8] Did you read or review other visitors' contributions in that big room at the end [to the younger boys P54 and P55]? The handwritten ones?*
> P53: Yes, we did.
> RC: So you [to the mother] now remember some of those?
> P53: Yes, I do.
> *RC: Did you find the kids were engaged?*
> P53: Oh yes, yes, they were straight into getting their hands on whatever they could ... chalk. We discussed the fact that it was a whiteboard with chalk rather than a black one. But we didn't really look at the responses.
> *RC: Can you remember one? What was memorable?*
> P53: Oh, the tag ones [secret ballot] were a bit disappointing, I suppose.
> *RC: Were they? How?*
> P53: Then there were some in foreign languages that we couldn't read so it would be interesting to see what they were.
> *RC: How did you feel when you were reading the other visitors' comments? Tell me why you felt disappointed by them.*
> P53: Oh, just, you know, the putting people down particularly. I'm just like, 'No ... I don't like the man either but too bad' (Laughs). I'm not going to write about it … and I think other people in other countries ... you can think it but once you put it down ... they could be quite afraid. Well not afraid, but very wary about doing that sort of thing.
> *Female, aged 45–54, teacher, Australian visiting with two sons (under 17 years)*

P53 was at first reticent to say she had read other visitors' comments but later acknowledged her disappointment and discomfort with the comments left in *Power of 1*, in particular those comments

that were critical of prime minister Abbott. P53's suggestion that visitors from other countries could be 'afraid' to see critical comments about Australia's prime minister reminded me of museum professional M8's comments that she did not support unconventional participatory approaches because museum spaces needed to be 'safe'; however this concern had not been expressed by other visitors. Some international visitors (P52 and P53) to the *Power of 1* were surprised that Australians were openly critical of the prime minister and relaxed about expressing this view in a public space. There was no suggestion during the interviews that the visitors' comments made anyone feel afraid or unsafe. I contend that for P53 and M8, the interviewees expressed cognitive dissonance with the content and were challenged by the exhibition. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Table 6.15. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Did you read or review other visitors' comments?'

Q8. Did you read or review other visitors' contributions?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Yes, I reviewed other visitor comments	122	90.4
	No, I didn't review other visitor comments	13	9.6
	Total	135	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	5	
Total		140	

6.4.9 Q9. Can you remember one [of the visitors' comments or contributions]? What was memorable?

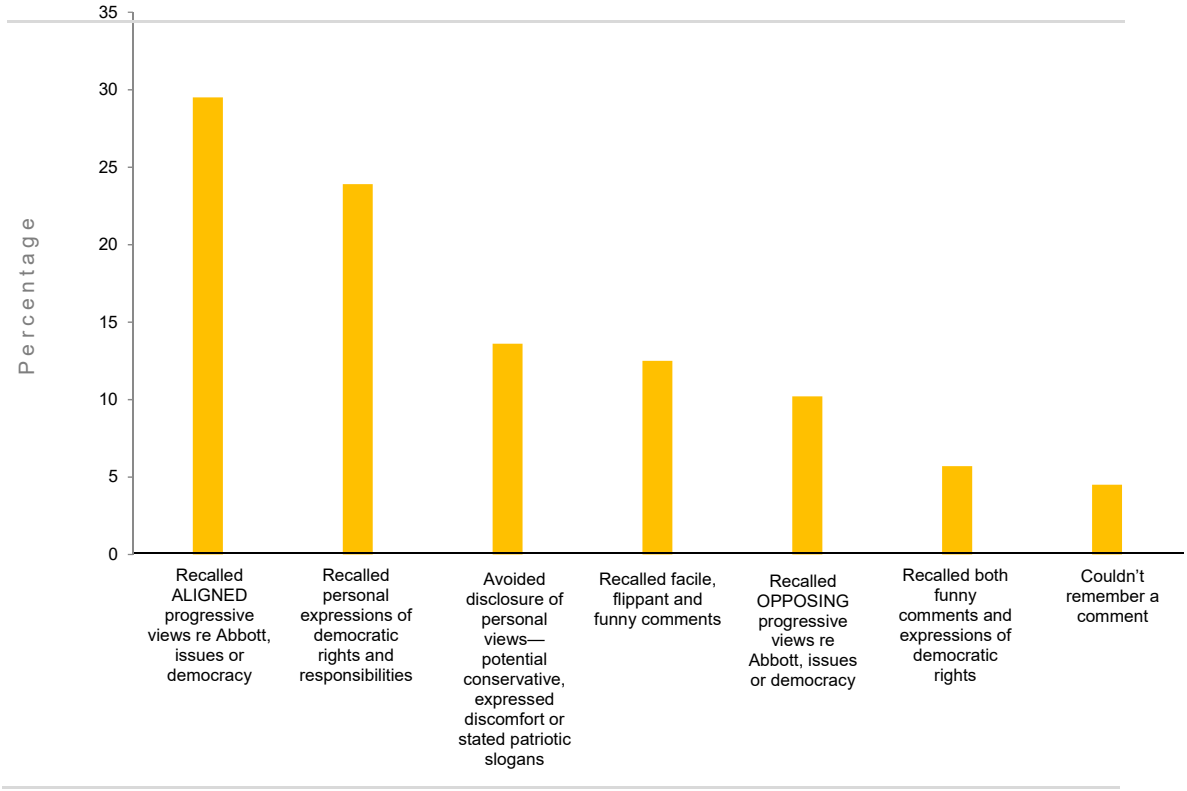


Figure 6.9: Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Can you remember one (of the visitors' comments or contributions)? What was memorable?'

Figure 6.9 and Table 6.16 show that almost all interviewees (95.5%) could remember at least one comment that was left by another visitor to the *Power of 1* exhibition. As demonstrated in question 8, sometimes visitors stated that they could not remember a previous comment or contribution but then referred to a comment later in the interview. When interviewees recalled another visitor's comment or contribution, they were more likely to be comments made via tangible, not digital, participation. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8. Nearly a third (29.5%) of visitors were most likely to remember other visitors' comments that aligned with their own progressive views about issues—including education, health, same-sex marriage, environment or immigration. Leadership concerns were another issue recalled by visitors as at the time of most of the interviews, Tony Abbott was a very unpopular Australian prime minister. Democratic practice, such as accountability for politicians who break their promises, was also memorable to visitors:

> P2L: The people who agreed with me (laughter).
> *Female, aged 55–64, education, Convict Australian*

> P2: There was one to do [on the secret ballot message wall] with, um, recognising Aboriginals, which was actually written in a really kind of sweet and heartfelt way, saying that they should have been treated well.

> P3: Yeah, they were here first, they should have been treated well.
> *Female, aged 25–34, public servant, Australian (P2)*
> *and male, aged 25–34, scientist, Australian (P3)*

> P6: That they should have a fair go.
> P5: The only one I read was about politicians who say they're not going to cut the ABC and then do.
> P6: That one about lying politicians, I like that one.
> P5: Shoot the lot.
> *Male, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian (P5)*
> *and female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian (P6)*

> P76: The ones that were very close to what I wanted to say. So because it's there, I thought many people think that too.
> *RC: Was that in the Builder Room, the iPad?*
> P76: The iPad, we didn't go through it a lot. But the last one [Tally Room], the one with cards [secret ballot], yeah, there is one that stands out. Mostly it's about free education and Medicare. That's what they [government] want to take from us. That's part of democracy we have here. They're taking the most important. We have this in overseas, in poor countries, we have free education. How come Australia can't afford that?
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

Note how P76 expressed how the comments by other visitors reassured her that people (who she did not know) shared her views about education and health care. P76 did not personally leave a comment because she was visiting with her children who had participated; however, P76 was participating in imagined conversations with people who shared her views. Conversations in museums have been found to help generate memories of museum experiences and make them more relevant to visitors (Falk and Storksdieck 2005) and the imagined conversations in the *Power of 1* as a result of the visitors' contributions appeared to achieve the same benefit. This will be further explored in the analysis of the follow-up interviews (see Chapter 7) and in the discussion (see Chapter 8).

Nearly a quarter of visitors (23.9%) recalled personal expressions of democratic rights and responsibilities:

> P16: The one that stood out was the one for equality for marriage, and I thought even though we are a democracy, there's still things that need to be worked on.
> *Female, aged 35–44, business owner, Aussie*

> P114: In the Builders Room, there was the freedom of speech.
> P113: We were talking about the fact that people were free to write whatever they want and we didn't get our heads chopped off. That's cool.
> P114: We could do and say whatever we like and with safety and how lucky we are. Somebody said we don't have a democracy but, really? It may not be a true democracy but it's better than other places. I still think it's better than America.
> *Female, aged 55–64, nurse, Anglo (P114) in conversation*
> *with male, aged 35–44, unemployed, Anglo (P113)*

> P72: The far wall that had a lot of the chalk writing on it—the graffiti wall. We read a lot of those. I think that one grabbed our attention first. I found that quite interesting. It had

> everything on there from, obviously, comments from adults to comments from little kids. It had the full range. I thought that was quite good.
> P72: There was somebody who swore at Abbott, or called him a bunch of exclamation points and an idiot. I thought that one stood out.
> P73: Some of the other ones on the little tags about 'we want our children to have the freedom to marry who they want' and people wanting free education and free health care for everybody. That sort of struck me.
> *Male, aged 35–44, defence public servant, white Caucasian (P72)*
> *and Female, aged 35–44, defence public servant, white Caucasian (P73)*

A small proportion (12.5%) of visitors only recalled flippant, facile or funny comments. For example, P5L recalled 'one of the not serious ones but I quite liked the one that said, "My voice counts because John Farnham said so"' (female, aged 25–34, retail, white Australian). Sometimes (5.7%) the humorous visitors' comments (or 'gobbledegook', 'silly' and off-topic as described by M9 in the museum professionals' interviews) prompted a memory of a more serious contribution and expression of democratic rights:

> P141: Yeah, I just remember the nice big wall, chalk. I did love the comment was, 'I get a say because I'm Clive Palmer' I loved that. But I liked … someone else wrote, 'I get a say because it impacts my life', so it's quite good.
> *Female, aged 25–34, events producer, German Taiwanese*

> P24: I saw someone wrote, 'I'm a kiwi'.
> P26: Tall people count too, and they'd written something up the top. A lot of them were about just having a voice and aspects around a democracy. There were a lot of messages around because we're a democracy we have such a great way of living, we need to hold on to that. So that's really impressive. It was good.
> *Male, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese (P24)*
> *and female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese (P26)*

This demonstrates that the humorous comments or contributions were memorable but did not preclude retention of more serious comments or reflections. Therefore, humorous contributions should not be censored, removed or moderated, as was done by some internal staff during the *Power of 1* exhibition. Further quotes from visitors that draw on the humorous and serious comments are found below:

> P107: It was either the extremely humorous ones or the ones that grasp the reasons for democracy as well. I think those are the two that stuck with me.
> *RC: Can you give an example of the humorous one?*
> P107: The humorous one was the one in the top right-hand corner [of the graffiti wall]. It was, 'What about the whale epidemic?' I thought it was pretty funny.
> *RC: And the democracy ones?*
> P107: I think the ones that were particularly centred around the right to a voice, regardless of how ... I guess it's the point of the exhibition as well: 'the power of one voice'. Anything centred around that, particularly about inclusiveness. For instance, people would write, 'I'm Australian' then people would write after that a comma and 'because I'm Asian' and then a comma 'because I'm Indigenous' and then comma ... there are a few of those around as well and I thought that they were quite interesting. The add-on effects. And that is the point of democracy as well, so that resonates with me.
> *Male, aged 25–34, doctor, Caucasian*

> P71: I recall the one that was at the top [of the graffiti wall/chalk wall]. Someone had left a comment which said, 'My right to believe in God'. But then someone had immediately written below it in a different colour their viewpoint 'or the devil' or something. And then I thought, well, that's interesting because there's kind of people trying to fight—or argue—on a wall.
> *Female, aged 45–54, public servant, mixed race*

In the two quotes above, P107 and P71 observed the ways that visitors comment on the previous messages of other visitors. These exchanges between people who visited the *Power of 1* at different times and days forged personal connections with the content and provided an opportunity for visitors to participate in conversations with real and imagined communities within the museum and beyond. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8. Although the humorous comments were memorable and often enjoyed by visitors, some visitors were disappointed that other visitors had not taken the opportunity to reflect more seriously with the content:

> P106: Some of the things that have been scrawled up in the Tally Room are just stupid. And that's disappointing. It almost means you should go back to the first one [room], 'what you don't like about democracy', and say you should have to pass an IQ test or something to be able to vote these days or leave your message on a message board. That's the world we live in.
> *Male, aged 55–64, retired, Anglo-Australian*

P106 expressed his frustration about the flippant comments by other visitors. His unease suggests he was challenged by the exhibition and its content; however, in reading his full interview, he expressed support for the *Power of 1*, its visitor content and message and identified its importance for Australians—in particular, young people—to have a voice in politics. P106 acknowledged his politics were progressive and was 'disenchanted' about the lack of political leadership and accountability in contemporary politics, expressing dissatisfaction with the adversarial politics and untrustworthy politicians that were discussed in the IGPA reports that informed the exhibition (Evans, Stoker and Nasir 2013; Evans, Halupka and Stoker 2014; IGPA 2014).

Many of the views expressed by visitors to the exhibition reflected progressive views about same-sex marriage, public education and asylum seekers. As most of the interviewees supported those views, this indicated that most of the sample size probably held progressive views. One-tenth (10.2%) of visitors recalled contributions that opposed their own views but did not express any discomfort:

> P22: Oh yeah, they were saying, 'Let's get rid of Tony Abbott and get a new government'.
> P21: I think he's a good prime minister.
> P22: Yeah, I think he's good but people have their own opinion.
> *Male, aged 25–34, carpenter, Aussie (P22)*
> *with his daughter (P21), aged under 17*

However, visitors who held conservative views may have felt uncomfortable or challenged by the exhibition. Some visitors (13.6%) with potentially conservative views avoided disclosing their own

opinions during the interview, using platitudes or stating that they did not remember the opposing views of other visitors that were extreme or disrespectful:

> P17: Um, not really. There were a few but it was mainly ... yeah, basically that everyone sort of wants the same things. I didn't really remember, like, one because they were all mainly similar.
> *Female, aged 35–44, trade, Anglo*

> P47: No, not anything else. Sorry.
> *RC: What about in that large room where you left that secret ballot. There's that thing on the wall.*
> P47: Oh, there's everyone's opinion on that wall. Then everyone's opinion with the secret ballot, it all gets put on there.
> *Male, aged 25–34, bank worker, Australia–Croatian*

> P44: There was a comment about Abbott and how they don't like him. Some of the things on the walls, some positive, some negative. There seemed to be extremes.
> *Female, aged 35–44, trade, Anglo*

> P101: I'd probably write my view up but I wouldn't be going over-the-top like some of them in there.
> *RC: What was it about them that wasn't quite what you liked?*
> P101: It's just that bit of disrespect for the current prime minister. Whether he's doing a good job or whether he's doing a bad job, he doesn't need to be spoken to like that.
> *Male, aged 35–44, manager, mixed race*

These visitors' comments support Smith's (2010) findings that some visitors will criticise an exhibition as being imbalanced when they are uncomfortable with the views being presented. This can be an indicator of cognitive dissonance, and conservative visitors may choose to dismiss exhibitions as imbalanced, or in this case 'extreme' or 'disrespectful', to give themselves permission to ignore the content.

In a participatory exhibition like the *Power of 1*, recalling other visitors' comments provided the majority of interviewees with an accessible and entertaining entry point to reflect on the messages and experiences within the *Power of 1*. The humorous comments were well-remembered by visitors but they did not detract from more serious reflection on ideas of democratic engagement and participation. The visitors' comments sometimes provoked a conversation with real or imagined communities both within the museum and beyond as illustrated when visitors left a note on a previous comment or felt reassurance that other citizens shared their views. Visitors who held opposing views were just as likely to avoid disclosing their opinions as they were to accept that people were entitled to hold differing views. These ideas will be further explored in Chapter 8.

Table 6.16. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Can you remember one of the other visitor's comments? What was memorable?'

Q9. Can you remember one [of the visitor comments or contributions]?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Recalled ALIGNED progressive views re Abbott, issues or democracy	26	29.5
	Recalled personal expressions of democratic rights and responsibilities	21	23.9
	Avoided disclosure of personal views, potential conservative, expressed discomfort or stated patriotic slogans	12	13.6
	Recalled facile, flippant and funny comments	11	12.5
	Recalled OPPOSING progressive views re Abbott, issues or democracy	9	10.2
	Recalled both funny comments and expressions of democratic rights	5	5.7
	Couldn't remember a comment	4	4.5
	Total	88	100.0
Missing	99	52	
Total		140	

6.4.10 Q10. How did you feel when you were reading the other visitors' comments?

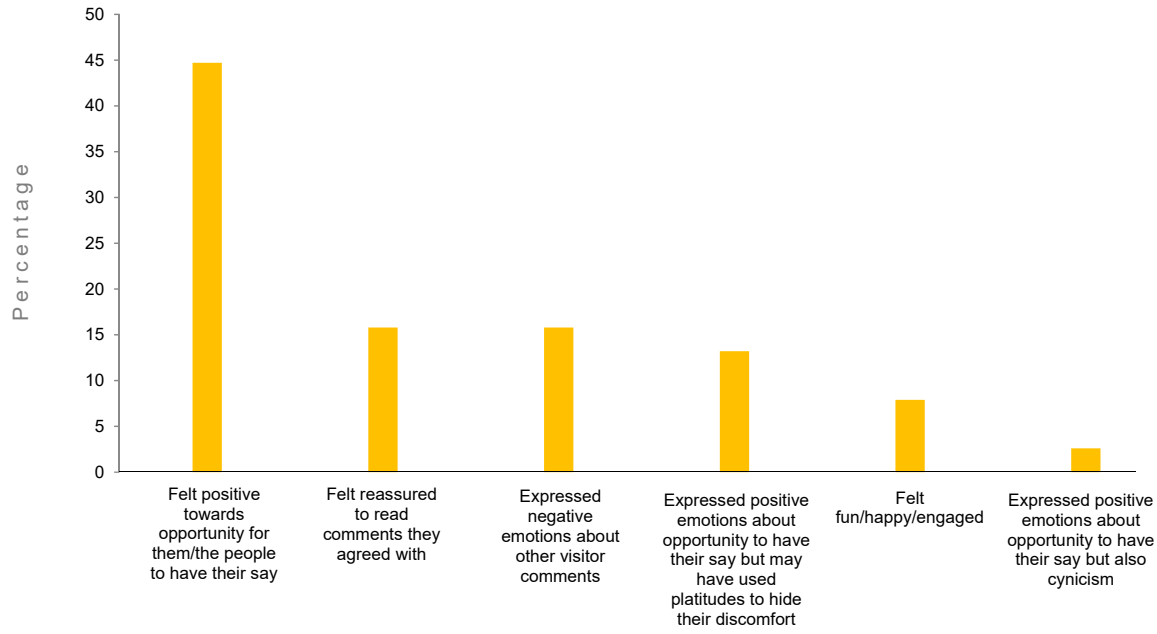


Figure 6.10. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'How did you feel when you were reading the other visitors' comments?'

Two-thirds (68.4%) of interviewees felt positive about the participatory content within the *Power of 1* exhibition (see Figure 6.10 and Table 6.17). Nearly half (44.7%) of visitors to the *Power of 1* said that when they read the comments and contributions of other visitors, they felt positive about the opportunity to take part in democratic expression and expressed feelings including pride, gratitude and empowerment. In describing these feelings, most of these visitors articulated an understanding of what the *Power of 1* exhibition hoped to achieve (i.e., 'to celebrate the changing nature of Australian democracy and the power of their voice within it'):

> P48: I think it's a really good opportunity for people to express themselves. Freedom of speech is fundamental. Just look at what's happening now in Paris [Charlie Hebdo and other terror attacks]. It's really important for people to have a forum and to have an opportunity now for young people, and I think young people probably do it more than old people but maybe old people do it to … be able to express yourself is very important. So I think it's really good.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P90: This is good. It was more of your say. If we could actually do this in Parliament House, this would be fricken unreal. If the pollies can stand around and do what they're doing, I mean, why can't we have our say?
> *Male, aged 35–44, aged care/disability care, Aussie*

> P71: I felt empowered because I thought it's really good that everybody can have a different viewpoint and then just understanding what's important to other people.
> *Female, aged 45–54, public servant, mixed race (P71)*

> P58: I guess it's just good to see people thinking about this stuff for themselves. You could notice just the style of writing on the wall meant that there was kids writing on there. There were older people writing there. Everyone was having a go, which was good.
> P57: It was quite exciting.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian (P58)*
> *and female, aged 25–34, student, Sri Lankan (P57)*

> P100: My opinion? I pretty much agreed with everything.
> P99: It was interesting to see where everyone stands. It's a public … you see the media and stuff [elsewhere] … but this [*Power of 1*] is people who actually come here. You see what they want to say.
> P100: Yeah, people are not just doing their jobs, [they're] just normal human beings.
> *Male, aged 18–24, retail, Australian (P100)*
> *and female, aged 18–24, retail, Australian (P99)*

The authenticity of 'normal human beings' contributing to an exhibition was received positively by these visitors. Many of them were pleased to see that children as well as adults were contributing. P16 felt positive about the comments from children, such as 'I am awesome', and reflected that it was 'great that they're coming and experiencing Parliament House' (female, aged 35–44, business owner, Aussie). The so-called off message comments that museum professional M9 viewed as 'not of huge value' and 'not very authentic' (see Chapter 5) were perceived by visitors to be an important, authentic and humanising element of the exhibition.

Around 15% (15.8%) of visitors indicated that they felt reassured to read comments with which they agreed. As noted previously, most of the comments tended to express progressive views. Thus, when visitors agreed with other comments, it felt 'very confirming, because they're things that, you know, I'd also thought' (P140: female, aged 45–54, academic, Whitebread Anglo). P63 also felt 'encouraged':

> P63: When you see a political comment on Twitter or Facebook that you don't agree with or you find problematic for whatever reason and it kind of makes you feel a bit cranky and a bit disillusioned ... I guess most of the comments that I looked at and heard in there were probably more aligned with my own political views so I felt quite comfortable with that. It was, on the whole, quite encouraging ... made me feel better about the future of the planet.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

One group of visitors (representing 13.2% of interviewees) appeared to express positive emotions but possibly used platitudes to hide their discomfort about what had been written by other visitors. Perhaps they were too polite or uncomfortable to express otherwise. A full reading of the interview transcripts for this group indicated some discomfort with the visitors' comments and attempts to avoid disclosure of personal views:

> P17: Well, it kind of made me feel, like ... well, some people, like everyone, sort of thinks differently but everyone sort of … well, like some people all thought like the same way but everyone sort of thinks differently.
> *RC: Yeah, and how did it make you feel when you read all those responses?*
> P19: Yeah, it's, I mean, like Maddie said, there's a lot of ... people think one-way, like left leaning and right leaning, whatever, so there's lots of different opinions but it's, like, in a way it's good because there is lots of opinions because then there's lots of ideas so.
> *Female, aged under 17, Anglo (P17)*
> *and Male, aged 35–44, trade, Anglo (P19)*

> P44: Oh, I tend to brisk over the negative ones and just look for the ones that are positive. It's more appealing. I think it's quite good, you know, that there's an opportunity for people to write what they think.
> *Female, aged 35–44, trade, Anglo*

> P107: Probably it made me feel ... I don't know. You look at all the negative comments then you forget that with one good comment. That gives you that sort of optimistic feeling. There is hope that there is at least one sound voice out there and it can drown out all the negative comments that some people make.
> *Male, aged 25–34, doctor, Caucasian*

Again, these visitors' comments indicated cognitive dissonance with the content of the exhibition. The visitors used platitudes and called for positivity and 'one sound voice' (P107) to avoid expressing their opposing views (Smith 2015). The platitudes echoed the comments by M8 in the professionals' interviews that were also occasionally unclear (similar to P19) but tried to be positive while expressing discomfort. This will be explored in Chapter 8.

Fewer than one in five (15.8%) visitors expressed negative emotions, such as anger, concern, disappointment or offence about other visitors' comments. These visitors held conservative views

that were, for the most part, not shared with the other predominantly progressive visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition. P47 was 'ah concerned':

> *RC: Why were you concerned?*
> P47: Yeah, just that, I don't want to go into it. Obviously other people have an opinion, which I basically accept, but obviously I don't support that but that's their views.
> *Male, aged 25–34, bank worker, Australia–Croatian*

> P101: Disappointed, you know. I didn't really want to stay in there for too long. I just thought no, I didn't need to be reading this and I just walked away.
> *Male, aged 35–44, manager, mixed race*

> *RC: So when you read those comments, were they already views you knew people had in Australia?*
> P39: Yes, and I totally disagree with it.
> *RC: Were there any comments there that you agreed with or found interesting?*
> P39: No, I found most of it was derogatory with personal attacks on Tony Abbott. People being flippant: 'I want to party'. And there was nothing of the short number that I did read that I would have agreed with.
> *Male, aged 55–64, dole, Anglo*

There were several comments from two international tourists who were interested but not fearful of the openly negative comments about Australia's then prime minister Abbott:

> P51: I think we are not so interesting and we don't know so much about the Australian politic but it's interesting that it's so hard against him.
> *RC: Were you surprised?*
> P51: Yeah, a little bit.
> *RC: Would something like that happen in Germany, do you think?*
> P52: I think the Germans are really proud of [Chancellor] Angela Merkel. I think sometimes they are not happy with it but they won't say anything against her.
> *RC: So you were surprised to see this?*
> P52: Yeah, the critic against the highest person in the state, yeah.
> *Female, aged 18–24, nursery teacher, German tourist (P51)*
> *and male, aged 18–24, nursery teacher, German tourist (P52)*

Two-thirds (68.4%) of interviewees felt positive about the participatory content within the *Power of 1*, feeling that it gave visitors a sense of agency, reassured visitors who held the same views and provided the opportunity to hear an authentic voice of 'normal human beings' (P100). A smaller proportion of visitors expressed discomfort, anger and disappointment, mostly because they were challenged by the opposing (mostly progressive) political views presented by other visitors. As the content was not controlled by the museum (depending on moderation policies), the participatory exhibition may have been confronting for some visitors; however, this is not a reason for museum professionals to increase censorship or to reduce support for participatory experiences. According to the visitors, exhibitions like the *Power of 1* were an important opportunity for citizens to debate and question ideas and decision-makers (either at the museum or in the political sphere), for visitors to express themselves and reflect on the diversity of opinions and experiences in their community and to provide an opportunity for visitors of all ages to practice participation and democracy. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Table 6.17. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'How did you feel when you were reading the other visitors' comments?'

Q10. How did you feel when you were reading the other visitor comments?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Felt positive towards opportunity for them/the people to have their say	17	44.7
	Felt reassured to read comments they agreed with	6	15.8
	Expressed negative emotions about other visitors' comments	6	15.8
	Expressed positive emotions about opportunity to have their say but may have used platitudes to hide their discomfort	5	13.2
	Felt fun/happy/engaged	3	7.9
	Expressed positive emotions about opportunity to have their say but also cynicism	1	2.6
	Total	38	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	102	
Total		140	

6.4.11 Q11. Have you participated in an exhibition like this before where visitors are asked to share responses?

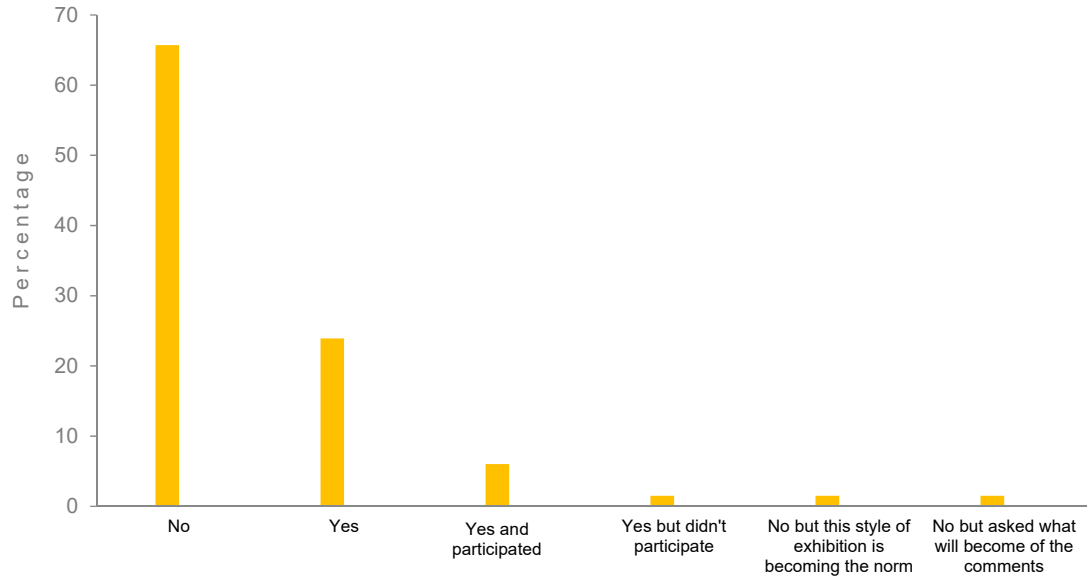


Figure 6.11. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Have you participated in an exhibition like this before where visitors are asked to share responses?'

A participatory exhibition was a new experience for over two-thirds of visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition (see Figure 6.11 and Table 6.18). International tourist P134 noted that, similar to the

observation by M7 in the professionals' interviews (see Chapter 5), the interactive style of the exhibition was new to him, but was reflective of the changing culture of social activities arising from the internet in which people are both producer and consumer:

> P134: I mean, the whole idea of the mobile phones or the selfie generation is that you express yourself, and often times if *when you go to museums it's just they expressing themselves on you.* So you're getting a chance, participants getting a chance to express was kind of nice. I liked it.
> *RC: Yeah, okay. So when you say usually at museums they express a view, do you mean the museum, the curators?*
> P134: I don't know about curators, but in terms of you, you are *just reading the information* or getting the information, you're not contributing to it in any way, and the whole internet idea is about prosumer, producer and consumer together. So you are also producing something and consuming something … so that's what I felt the concept tries to do.
> *Male, aged 25–34, computer scientist, Indian tourist*

Note, again, the use of the word 'just' in P134's interview to describe traditional museum experiences, a word that was also used by P12 who conceded that participatory experiences were becoming more common in museums:

> P12: This is becoming more of an experience that you tend to find … not necessarily in Old Parliament House.
> *RC: So you weren't expecting to find something like this in Old Parliament House?*
> P12: No, not in an older building.
> *RC: Do you think it fits in?*
> P12: I think it does. I think it might bring in different ideas and people interacting with what they see and what they do. *Rather than just speaking about it* to the person that's there, they've gone home and spoken about it, 'I've gone to Old Parliament House and this and that', but interacting with it here.
> *Male, aged 55–64, engineer, first generation Australian and Italian origin*

Less than a third (31.4%) of visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition had previously attended or participated in a participatory exhibition. Only 6% of interviewees had previously visited and participated in an exhibition in which visitors were asked to share responses. For most visitors, participation was still a very new concept:

> P104: Probably not on politics, but other ones but not as official. More smaller galleries, it was more collaborative art stuff, rather than democracy museum interactive … or more science-y or whatever. A lot of the science stuff can be very interactive but not normally politics unless you do your school education thing.
> *Female, aged 35–44, student, Swiss*

> P73: We have been to other museums and places where they've had those. We don't tend to participate in those but it is always interesting to reflect on what other people have said.
> *Female, aged 35–44, defence public servant, white Caucasian*

> P112: Yes, I've seen lots of exhibition where you participate, but not where the whole exhibition is about responses but where there is a component of a visitor response … either drawing or answering a question or a comment card.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Australian English*

It is surprising and encouraging that most visitors (68.7%) had never attended let alone participated in a participatory exhibition before, yet more than half the visitors (58.5%) participated in the *Power of 1* (i.e., they chose to leave a comment or contribution). This result shows the potential value of participation to museums. Participation is easy to understand, accessible and welcomed by the majority of visitors, and this, combined with the high recall result and ability of visitors to make meanings from and share the message of the exhibition is notable and should redress the concerns expressed by some internal staff members who resisted participation.

Table 6.18. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Have you participated in an exhibition like this before where visitors are asked to share responses?'

Q11. Have you participated in an exhibition like this before where visitors are asked to share responses?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	No	44	65.7
	Yes	16	23.9
	Yes, and participated	4	6.0
	Yes, but didn't participate	1	1.5
	No, but this style of exhibition is becoming the norm	1	1.5
	No, but asked what will become of the comments	1	1.5
	Total	67	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	73	
Total		140	

6.4.12 Q12. How does it make you feel to visit this exhibition?

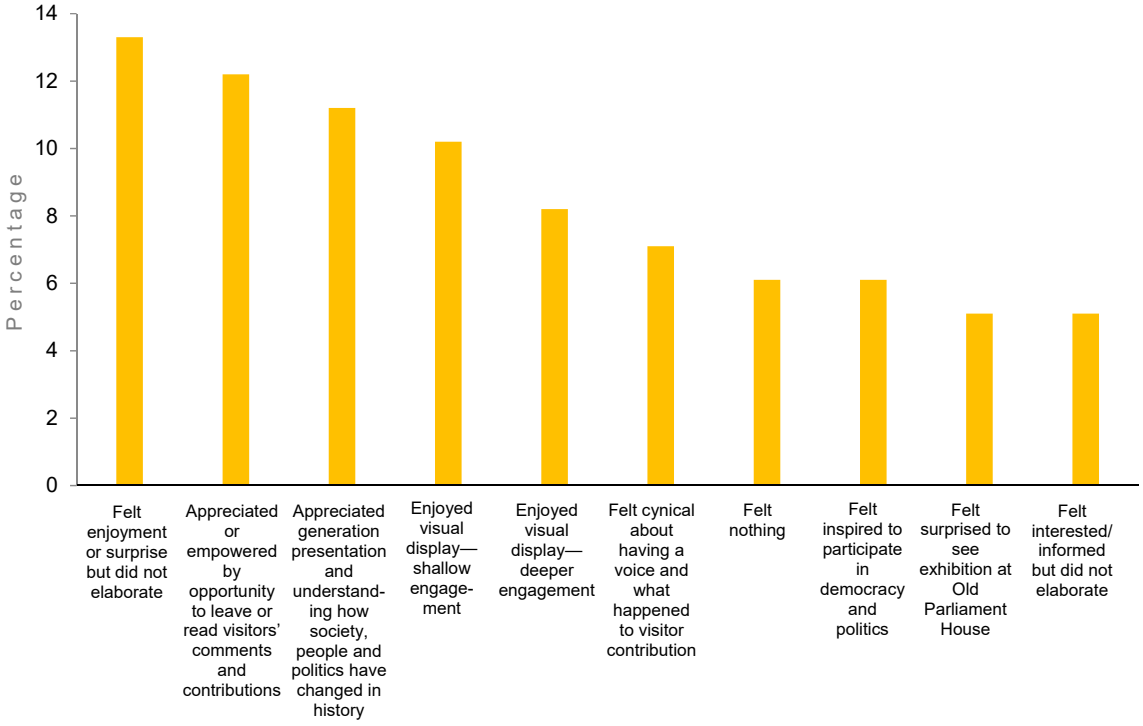


Figure 6.12. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'How does it make you feel to visit this exhibition?'

Although a range of feelings were expressed by visitors, around four in five visitors (80.6%) to the *Power of 1* expressed positive emotions in response to the exhibition, including enjoyment, empowerment, excitement, inspiration, gratitude and interest (see Figure 6.12 and Table 6.19). Whether positive or negative emotions were felt by visitors, high levels of deep engagement with the exhibition was demonstrated in the answers to this question.

Some visitors (13.3%) felt enjoyment or surprise, while others felt interested and informed (5.1%) but did not elaborate. The visual display, including the shoes, iPods hanging from the ceiling and nostalgic items displayed in unusual ways were commented on by nearly one in five (18.4%) visitors as bringing enjoyment. Of these, 8.2% of interviewees demonstrated how the visual presentation and participatory activities deepened their engagement with the exhibition, thinking about the past in the present or reflecting on their own lives and experiences in relation to the exhibition content. In this way, the visual presentation of *Power of 1* helped to overcome initial disinterest in MoAD, as discussed by P71 and P70:

> P71: I felt really good because when we were coming, one of the children made the comment, 'Oh, this is so boring, this is such a boring place'. So when we came into this particular exhibition they just got really excited. I really liked that everyone got really excited and each room was a new stimulation for them … and having the interactivity. And even the first piece of artwork when we walked in there [the shoes], I liked what Lisette got

> out of it when she walked in. She said, 'It's being led by children's shoes'. I thought that is nice.
> P70: Basically, to me that means children lead the world.
> *Female, aged 45–54, public servant, mixed race (P71)*
> *and female, aged under 17, mixed race (P70)*

This view from P71 aligns with the view of the museum director (M5), who appreciated the aesthetics of the *Power of 1* exhibition. The museum director and most of the museum professionals also hoped the exhibition would appeal to young people and express that MoAD was doing things differently. This was observed by some visitors (5.1%), who were surprised to see a contemporary exhibition at Old Parliament House, a heritage building with a political history:

> P119: Oh, I thought it was different, and it made me feel good that the building was being used as a space to be able to do things differently, like an innovation. It wasn't trapped in an historical way of doing things, so I felt that that was really good. I felt really good that it was being used in a way that wasn't like a stuffy or traditional way of doing things.
> *Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal*

Although the visual presentation and structure of the exhibition was noted by visitors, many expressed feelings relating to the exhibition's theme of participating in Australia's democracy. More than one in 10 visitors (12.2%) said they appreciated or were empowered by the opportunity to leave or read visitors' comments and contributions. The act of leaving a comment or reading one was perceived as being part of a conversation with real or imagined communities, including decision-makers, peers or other Australians. For P108, she was surprised that 'there were so many young people who understood issues and could write something they would fight for'. In this way, the visitors' contributions in the *Power of 1* brought P108 into a conversation with a community of people with whom she did not know but with whom her views were shared about issues that were important to her, such as same-sex marriage, asylum seekers and freedom of speech:

> P108: At school, there are not that many people who have these types of interests. If you asked them what they'd fight for, they wouldn't be able to tell you because they wouldn't know. I was quite surprised that there are so many people.
> *Female, aged 18–24, professional, multicultural (P108)*
> *and male, aged 45–54, professional, multicultural (P110)*

Other visitors were cognisant that their own comments (and the contributions of other visitors) would be read by someone in authority, and for P105 this made him feel 'like genuinely listened to':

> P105: So, like, you sit there, you have everyone and they've said their own thing and it seems like, I don't know whether it's true, but it seems like there's going to be someone who goes through and writes that down and actually listens to what random people have come in and said.
> *Male, aged 18–24, former teacher,*
> *now a postgraduate student in Masters of Art Therapy, Australian*

These conversations with imagined or real communities as a result of museum participation will be explored more fully in Chapters 7 and 8. Previous questions in this study have already shown that

participatory experiences, when offered, were valued by visitors. The responses to question 12 revealed feelings and attitudes towards the experience of participation in an exhibition and indicated its strong potential for democratic engagement:

> P30: Great to see people trying to get the information from people in a friendly positive approach, rather than someone sitting there and asking questions or you're having to sit there and work it out yourself. It was in separate rooms, it was engaging. Every time you went in there was something different. So there was, 'I wonder what this is about?' Or, 'I can find out a bit more about this'. Or, 'I'll have a go at this'. It was easy and I took it all in. Writing a few words was easy as well. It was great. This [the interview] is more confronting.
> *Female, aged 55–64, Member of Parliament, Australian/Italian*

> P56: Look, I thought it was interesting, worthwhile. How did it make me feel? I pondered why I didn't wish to participate in the interactive things … made me feel like a Luddite because I still don't like doing selfies (laughs). I must say, I was heartened by those ones I read. I felt good and positive and connected, I guess, with those responses.
> *Female, aged 55–64, finance executive, Anglo*

P30 felt the exhibition was 'friendly', 'engaging' and 'easy', and although P56 chose not to leave a message and was challenged by the technology, she was grateful for the opportunity to read other visitors' comments and connect with her community. Choosing not to leave a message did not diminish the experience of visitors. The structure of the exhibition, based around four generations of Australians, was given as a reason for why more than one in 10 (11.2%) visitors felt they enjoyed the exhibition. This structure, which provided an accessible or familiar entry point for many visitors, in particular for groups of visitors consisting of different generations, also helped to develop a shared understanding and empathy between different generations of Australians.

> P82: I liked the whole, like, going back into the generations. I thought that was really cool. And it's good to see how things changed over time. It was like there was a lot of art, arty stuff, and then you got to the gen Z and there were just iPhones everywhere and that was powerful, I think.
> *RC: Are you in gen Y?*
> P82: I think I'm Z.
> *RC: Did you feel that that was a reflection of your generation?*
> P82: Yes, definitely.
> *Female, aged 18–24, public servant, Aussie*

> P96: In simple words, it made me understand the way the generations have changed. I can connect in some way which generation I belong to and how my father … his political views … how they somehow reflected on it. It's quite common.
> *Female, aged 25–34, engineer, Indian*

> P116: It made me feel pretty amazed, since how they laid it out and how they designed it was like pretty cool [an 11 year old boy].
> P117: I like that it was the generational way of being able to, again, show the kids and explain things to the kids, particularly with the iPod room. It's a way that they can understand it. That was good.
> *Male, aged under 17, Anglo (P116)*
> *and female, aged 35–44, technician, Anglo (P117)*

> P48: I think it's really good. I think it's representative of the various eras. It's understated, it's not a busy exhibition. It's not like there is a lot to take in all the time. It was very understated. The builders were very understated. To me, it was clean but it captured the essence of the particular times of each one of those particular eras.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P58: I thought it was really interesting to see it broken down in the way it was, and seeing something that would probably be familiar to the age groups in that space. I think it was really nice to see, and quite different to see the other ones [generations] apart from the ones that we are familiar with.
> P57: I thought the set-up for each of the generation rooms was very creative and well done.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian (P58)*
> *and female, aged 25–34, student, Sri Lankan (P57)*

These visitors' comments undermined museum professional M8's assertion that the generational structure was unclear, incomplete and lacked richness. They also alleviated M9's criticism that the generational approach needed additional detailed information, including 'museum-y' objects and additional directions for visitors in each of the generation rooms. However, it should be noted that a small number of visitors (3) felt disconnected from their own generational profile or felt that the generational approach was 'compartmentalising':

> P2: I feel really disconnected by the [Gen Y] room [with iPods] that was meant to represent our generation I didn't feel a lot of connection with the social media buzz stuff. We're all people who are probably quite politically interested and I just, yeah, a lot of those things made me feel kind of worried about how the future will pan out … it feels like it's encapsulating … this one device but there's more to it. It just feels there's more to us.
> *Female, aged 25–34, public servant, Australian (P2)*

> P5: In the Boomers Room, it made out we were all well-off and we all had an easy run, and I'll tell you we've been married since I was 16 and we lived in a four room, wooden shack and no hot water, no stove, no nothing. We fought all our lives to get what we got now. And it drives me insane. It says we're selfish and we're not.
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian (P6)*

> P67: It was good. I think I'm thinking deeper than I should here … bit compartmentalising, in a sense it's good but it's also a little bit sad that it's separate. Just that it's 'this is your box, this is your box, this is my box' [about the generation rooms]. But it was quite cool and well done.
> *Female, aged 55–64, teacher, Anglo, visiting with her grandson*

The interviewees above felt challenged by their generational profiles; however, a reading of their full interview transcripts shows that these visitors felt a deep engagement with the topic and content, related it to their own experiences and demonstrated an appreciation for democracy, including the opportunity to have a say. It would be fair that these visitors expressed a slightly gloomier outlook than other visitors and, thus, were less comfortable with the generalisation of the generational profiles.

For a small proportion (4.1%) of visitors, a feeling of gratitude for Australia's political system emerged, showing deep reflection about the types of engagement across the various generations and an appreciation for the stability of the system across time:

> P63: I felt positive but also quite grateful for the political system that we do have. You can make a lot of criticisms about the people working within it but the political system as a whole does tend to work quite well. And I think that is actually celebrated quite well through the exhibition. There is quite a strong thread about how stable and peaceful our political system has been. Even looking across the demographics, you get a sense that people have different priorities but the different demographics are still very much engaged in that political process.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

> P118: Interesting. I'm a little bit frustrated about how slow sometimes democracy works … pleased that it does eventually get there. Maybe it's a generation thing. When people want something, they want it now. You can't achieve that in democracy because there are fixed timeframes, but knowing that eventually it will come round, and if enough people eventually think the same way, it will happen.
> *Male, aged 35–44, technician, Anglo*

An additional 6.1% of visitors felt inspired to participate more in politics because of the exhibition, and 3.1% of visitors said they enjoyed the exhibition and demonstrated a deep engagement and understanding of Australian democracy, its history and current opportunities to participate. These were key goals of the exhibition:

> P141: I think it's quite interesting because I think I'm getting into that age group now where I should be more interested in politics and I should, you know, have more of an interest in it. It kind of makes me think, you know, maybe I should read the news more often and, you know, know what's going on in my country that I live in. And, you know, maybe you think about what you want from your politicians. That's probably my first thought.
> *RC: That's really interesting. So from watching, seeing the exhibition or visiting the exhibition, you thought, oh, maybe you need to do a bit more? Is that right?*
> P141: Yeah, a little bit more. Contribute a bit more, yeah.
> *RC: Is that right? That's great. So how would you contribute more? What would you do?*
> P141: I think just educating yourself and knowing more about what's going on in politics is probably a good first step because I don't think … I don't think any of my friends, either, are really interested in any of it, either. I think I'm going to start reading the news in the morning, watching the news, yeah.
> *Female, aged 25–34, events producer, German Taiwanese*

This response by P141 that she should participate and engage more directly in politics suggests that museums could certainly play a role in promoting democratic engagement, encouraging activism and demonstrating the power of citizen participation to improve their world. This is an achievable goal because visitors stated that as a result of the *Power of 1* exhibition, they planned to be more actively engaged with democracy, either by prompting action, a change in behaviour or by gaining a deeper appreciation of democracy, its practice and its history. Six of the 140 interviewed visitors stated that as a result of the exhibition, they would participate more actively in politics and noted that the exhibition highlighted the multiple ways that people could engage. P58 said that 'you don't

just have to join a party'. One visitor described the exhibition as a 'wake-up call' and noted he needed to take 'a more active role' in the political system, '[o]therwise it will be left to the politicians and it will continue to decline' (P142). It appears that visitors to the participatory *Power of 1* exhibition were prompted to change their behaviour more than is typically found in museum exhibitions. Smith's (2016a, 2016b, 2017) study of 4,504 visitors to museums and heritage sites across three countries found only four people who had been inspired to change their behaviour. This is an area that would benefit from further research and will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Again, the broader disaffection and cynicism about politics crept into a small proportion (7.1%) of visitors' feelings regarding the exhibition:

> P5: When you say that your voice does count, I just think bullshit. At the moment I'm having a bit of a battle in Victoria with the tennis centre because they've moved their car parking for disabled people down one end and I've booked into see the tennis at the other end. And I have contacted some politicians in Victoria and really …
> P6: They don't answer, they don't care.
> P5: And it makes me feel … and I do feel really strongly about the asylum seekers and the racial tones that come out of our government. I hate it, hate it with a passion.
> P5: The older ones [politicians], they had a vision to do something for the country. I think Whitlam and Hawke and even Paul Keating, they were just characterful. I don't think they were dishonest like these ones are today. It doesn't matter which side …
> P6: He's only interested in his job.
> P5: It seems to me they're only interested in their job, their occupation and to keep going. It's not policy, it's to get me elected next time. That's what makes me angry about it, so there you go. I do write letters but I get to this age and realise that it doesn't make any difference.
> P5: It is because we're such a lucky country. We could do so much more, you know, we shouldn't expect people to have a lower standard of living. We are lucky here.
> *Male, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian (P5)*
> *and female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian (P6)*

Some interviewees said they felt enjoyment (13.3%) or interest (5.1%) but did not reveal deep emotional engagement with the *Power of 1*. Several visitors said that they felt nothing (6.1%). Of this proportion, one visitor mentioned they preferred the traditional display of the prime minister's office at Old Parliament House, saying, 'It's not quite what we came here for, even though it was something different, we'd probably prefer to go to the prime minister's office' (P65: male, aged 18–24, public servant, Anglo). Another said, 'It was interesting more than anything, it didn't emote a particular feeling' (P107: male, aged 25–34, doctor, Caucasian). One group of visitors said the exhibition was a 'bit of fun in such a conservative environment' (P132):

> P130: It could be really, really boring here. It could just be things from the past, and it's not.
> P132: Dark furniture, dark doors, dark rooms, dark, old-fashioned dark buildings and a bit of fun in the middle of it.
> *Male, aged 55–64, property manager, white Caucasian (P130)*
> *and female, aged 55–64, property manager, white Caucasian (P132)*

For P72, the exhibition left him feeling 'neutral' because the comments from visitors represented diversity and balanced views:

> P72: Probably neutral, in the sense it was balanced. It reflected something from each of the generations so I thought that was useful. And the graffiti wall, I thought, was still a neutral experience in that it had comments, both positive and negative, from everybody. Overall, it was interesting.
> *Male, aged 35–44, defence public servant, white Caucasian (P72)*

The mostly positive but diverse responses from visitors about how the *Power of 1* exhibition made them feel is not surprising. Visitors responded in personal ways to the approach, content and visitor contributions in the exhibition. The responses from visitors showed a predominantly deep engagement with the ideas of the exhibition, including an appreciation of how democracy has changed throughout history, the development of a shared understanding of other generations' democratic engagement and the intention to change participatory behaviour in the political process. Some visitors felt nothing, and for a small number of other visitors the *Power of 1* and its participatory approach did not resonate. These responses show that most visitors were open to new ways of interpreting museum experiences, and valued the visitor-generated content and simple but visually compelling entry points, such as the generation rooms. That some visitors expressed a feeling of disconnection from the generational definition was to be expected. These were very loose interpretations and were designed to provoke discussion and debate, which they achieved. Such a range of responses is normal and should not be a reason to dismiss the whole approach or fail to take lessons from it; however, the depth of engagement that arose from the exhibition and the motivation to prompt a change in behaviour is a strong indication of the potential value of participatory experiences for museums. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Table 6.19. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'How does it make you feel to visit this exhibition?'

Q12. How does it make you feel to visit this exhibition?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Felt enjoyment or surprise but did not elaborate	13	13.3
	Appreciative of or empowered by the opportunity to leave or read visitors' comments and contributions	12	12.2
	Appreciated generational presentation, understanding how society, people and politics have changed throughout history	11	11.2
	Enjoyed visual display, shallow engagement	10	10.2
	Enjoyed visual display, deeper engagement	8	8.2
	Felt cynical about having a voice and what happened to visitor contributions	7	7.1
	Felt nothing	6	6.1
	Felt inspired to participate in democracy and politics	6	6.1
	Felt surprised to see exhibition at Old Parliament House	5	5.1
	Felt interested/informed but did not elaborate	5	5.1
	Felt gratitude for Australia's democracy	4	4.1
	Felt disconnected from other Australians or their generation	3	3.1
	Felt enjoyment/excitement, linked experience to a deeper understanding of democracy/politics now or in the past	3	3.1
	Felt interested/informed, deeper engagement	2	2.0
	Nostalgic	1	1.0
	Felt disaffection about Australian democracy, deep engagement	1	1.0
	Felt reflective about Australian political history and how it has changed	1	1.0
	Total	98	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	42	
Total		140	

6.4.13 Q13. So what messages about Australian democracy do you take away from this exhibition?

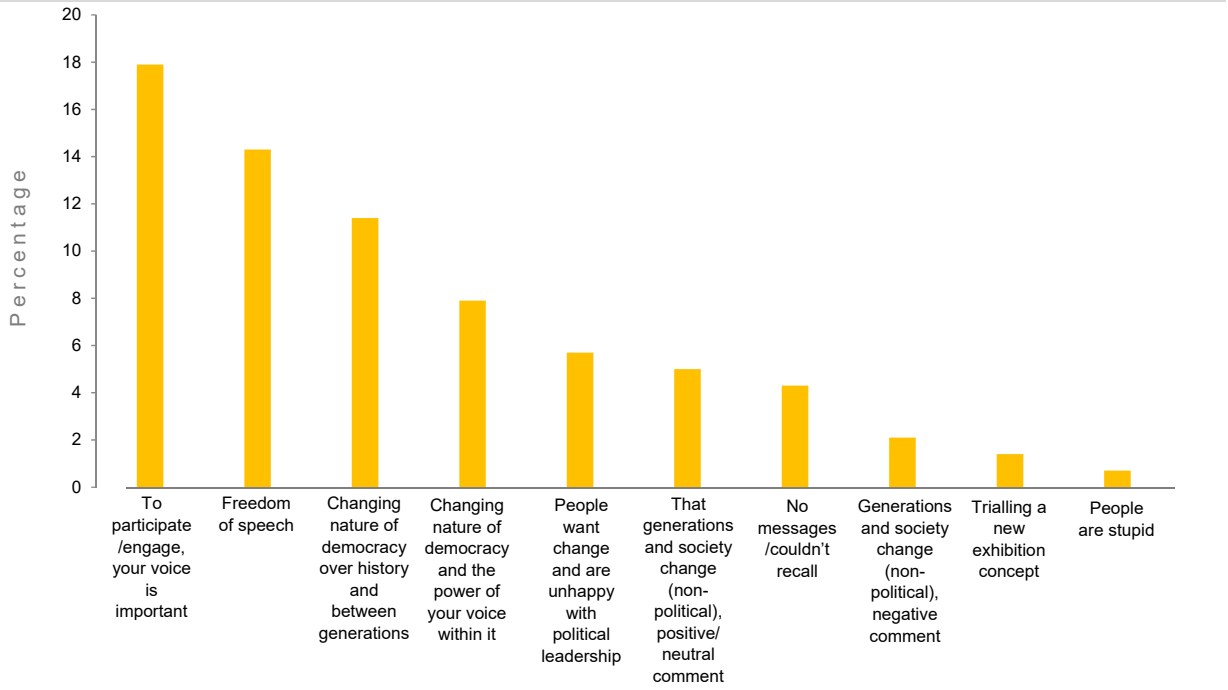


Figure 6.13. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'So what key messages about Australian democracy do you take away from this exhibition?'

The answers to question 13 demonstrated thoughtful engagement with the exhibition content and themes. Interviewees referred to other visitors' contributions as well as the content developed by MoAD and the project team about democracy engagement levels across different generations and the national baseline survey research results (see Figure 6.13 and Table 6.20). A staggering 84.9% of visitors took messages from the exhibition that related to the intended themes and aims as defined by the organisers, including messages referring to freedom of speech and generational and democratic change. However, the most frequent response given by a quarter (25.3%) of visitors was that they thought the exhibition's message was that people needed to participate more and their voice was important:

> P58: I think it's trying to say that you, as an individual, hold significance. I guess it is easy to think that you're not contributing or your vote doesn't matter. But the idea of it [the exhibition], I guess, is saying it does count, what you think.
> P57: Especially the idea that you don't just have to join a party and do specific things to have your voice count. Social media was a big thing that was raised in that room. I thought that was great. I think it was quite inspiring to see. It inspired us to say 'our voice counts' but not just in a specific way. There are ways to change Australia.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian (P58)*
> *and female, aged 25–34, student, Sri Lankan (P57)*

> P63: It's interesting. It seemed to be encouraging people to participate and to take part and have a view and have an opinion and express that, which is very interesting in the context that we have mandatory voting in Australia.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

One in five visitors (20.2%) said that the message of the exhibition was freedom of speech, and while this is similar to the response relating to the power of voice, it tended not to translate the importance of freedom of speech into individual action to affect change:

> P13: It's freedom of speech. Being able to communicate that with someone who can, I guess, speak for you in a way.
> *Male, aged 35–44, business owner, Aussie*

> P44: I would say that everyone's got a voice, and everyone has a right to say what they think and believe and feel.
> *Male, aged 35–44, trade, Anglo (P45)*

> P137: Well I think we're very lucky because, you know, you obviously see other situations in the world, and we can express our opinions and we don't have to fear anything. We could freely go after any politician in the street or anywhere and express our opinion. Obviously, as long as we're not violent or yelling or anything like that, we can come and express our opinion of anyone and we have no fear. We don't have to fear any reprisals, which I think is the important thing, you know. As long as you do it in the right context: you're calm, you're factual within the sort of parameters of your knowledge, and we can walk away and we have no fear that someone's going to come up behind us and whatever. A lot of people don't have that. I think that's important.
> *Male, aged 55–64, health care, European (P137)*
> *and male, aged 45–54, health care, Anglo Saxon (P138)*

P137's assertion that Australians have the freedom to express their views without fear of reprisal is a significant rebuttal to M8's claim (Chapter 5) that a curatorial voice (and the voices of notable Australians) was necessary to filter visitors' views and create a so-called 'safe' place. Museum professional M8 was, in fact, advocating censorship and control, the opposite of democracy as defined by Shapiro (2009). This demonstrates how museums continue to be undemocratic, even at a museum of democracy.

The next most frequent response (16.2%) was that the message of the exhibition related to the changing nature of democracy throughout history and between generations. This comment was often expressed by visitors as pride or gratitude in Australia's democratic system of democracy, and reflections on changes to values, technologies and expectations.

> P53: That we are able to change over time, I suppose. That we are quite lucky that we have kept up with the world. We are ahead of it in some cases. The breakdown of the [research] questions without going into too much detail, that was interesting.
> *Female, aged 45–54, teacher, Australian*

> P19: Yeah, just the way things have sort of progressed. Like with increased wealth and there's a lot more time on people's hands to think about things. Like now, with the younger generation again, because prosperity is so high, they've got a lot more time to sit around and think about stuff and ... not complaining but, yeah, complain. But you can see

> right back, like, the builders just wanted to get on with things and get things done. Now there's a bit more leisure time, so to speak, a lot more idle time to think about stuff, to think about smaller issues. But back then, it was just bigger issues.
> *Male, aged 35–44, trade, Anglo*

> P8: People's expectations of it have changed.
> P7: Yes.
> *RC: So people's expectations of democracy?*
> P8: Yes.
> *RC: Do you think that's because of our current culture or politicians or?*
> P8: No, I think it's the generational thing. So do I want, me personally, a 'none of the above' on the ballot form? No, I want a decision. Whereas, you know, the younger generations, I find it a bit intriguing that they'll want that option. But hang on, it doesn't work. And you know, I think they'd be the first to bitch about the way of running things today, but if you go down that path when once upon a time you either got one or the other and whether you like it or not, we ended up with a very stable country with a very stable government because of it, so do you really want to mess with that? I don't think so.
> *Male, aged 45–54, defence, Aussie (P8)*
> *and female, aged 45–54, defence, Aussie*

More than one in 10 (11.1%) visitors answered that the message of the exhibition related to the changing nature of democracy, but added that another component to the message was the power of their voice within that changing democracy. This was the defined 'big idea' or message of the exhibition by the organisers of 'the changing nature of Australian democracy and the power of their voice within it' (MoAD 2014b). The answers given by these visitors were thoughtful and engaged and showed an ability to link the various themes, activities and displays in the exhibition and relate them to their own lives and experiences:

> P12: The importance, like you say, of the power of one. The importance of it for previous generations, for instance, for people, like, people who came before me [such as builders] and also my generation [boomers], we tend to keep to ourselves. Although we were pretty vocal when things counted and we did demonstrations and things like that. Particularly the Vietnam period and during the constitutional crisis we had here. You know. All that. Very clear. All that. Of course, we were taking part in that but generally quiet as far as us individually. As a bigger group, yes, a voice. But individual voice is not something that we think is that important.
> *RC: Is that because you were trying to be private?*
> P12: I think it's now we have different devices and devices make everything public. That's what I'm saying about gen Y and the way they think, the way they interact. X as well. But for an older boomer, we tended to be a bit more private but public when it needed to be … focused when we needed to.
> *Male, aged 55–64, engineer, first generation Australian and Italian origin*

> P30: What messages about democracy? The freedom to be able to have your own say, the freedom to write what you want to write. To say what you want to say. That it has been growing through the ages, evolving through time. You just have to look at this Parliament House and the other one. Looking at the shoes was quite interesting. I thought, 'What's this all about?' It's a nice way to show people voting with their feet, I suppose.
> P30: I think it's going to keep going. And it also shows, even when I looked at those cards, you could tell which ones an 18-year old filled in and which ones a 60-year old might have filled in. It was quite different range of responses.
> *Female, aged 55–64, Member of Parliament, Australian/Italian*

> P142: As a result of the exhibition, yeah, we've got a long history of … for all this recent turmoil there's still a stable political system, even if the personalities aren't and one that, I think, virtually to a person in this country, people want to retain and don't want to change much. But I also took away from the exhibition, as a result of my thoughts and reading the thoughts of others, the belief that our political system needs to be thoroughly reworked to become something that's much more effective and much more representative of the people ... one of the iPads in the exhibition asked me, do I use this form of media or that form of media, most of which were electronic, to communicate in a political way and do I, am I influenced or do I think those forms of media are influential. One of the things I take away is that I do actually intend to utilise those forms of media should the occasion arise and I can.
> *RC: Is this specifically relating to issues of politics and democracy?*
> P142: Specifically relating to issues of politics and democracy.
> *Male, aged 45–54, doctor, Caucasian*

The visitors quoted above demonstrated a deep engagement with many aspects of the exhibition and its approach, including the historical and research content of the exhibition prepared by the project team, the visitors' contributions, the invitation to participate or activate visitor agency and their own connections to their lived experience of democracy. This is a significant achievement for the *Power of 1* exhibition and exceeded the expectations of the exhibition's organisers.

Around one-tenth of visitors (10.1%) commented on the generational displays in the exhibition, noting the different technologies or values. These comments were made without any connection to democracy or politics, and were more to reflect or pass judgement on how different generations contribute to society or compare with their own generation. Most of these (7.1%) were positive comments, perhaps nostalgic with fairly shallow engagement, but others (3%) were negative and these visitors took the opportunity to denigrate other generations' experiences and values. The following examples show both the positive and negative comments regarding the different generations:

> P89: It's about the changes through the generations, I guess. It's a matter of everybody seeing those changes and what's happened between now and back then.
> P90: The generation of playing outside to the generation of sitting on computers. Technology is there, we need it, but get your head out of the computer.
> *Female, aged 35–44, aged care/disability care, Aussie (P89)*
> *and male, aged 35–44, aged care/disability care, Aussie (P90)*

> P116: Maybe it's that life has, like, completely changed. Once there was a huge computer, now it's all in one iPod. Just amazing.
> *Male, aged under 17, household occupation technician, Anglo (P116)*

> P38: The builders and the baby boomers are, basically, we're all hard workers who worked for everything they got. We were willing to start from small and build up. X, Y and Z, basically, they just want stuff handed to them. That's what I thought, how about you?
> P39: It's the same sort of thing. Technology is changing and perceptions of what you're entitled to have also changed.
> P38: That sense of entitlement is alive today.
> *Female, aged 55–64, dole, Anglo (P38)*
> *and male, aged 55–64, dole, Anglo (P39)*

A small proportion of visitors (8.1%) took the exhibition's message from the content of other visitors' comments, many of which were critical or negative of the government, rather than the prescribed message of the exhibition from MoAD. This is what curators and museum professionals who seek to retain conventional interpretation methods fear: diminished control of the museum experience and the loss of curatorial authority. The responses from visitors below demonstrate that such a risk is possible as a result of participatory exhibitions; however, it is a small risk, as fewer than 10% of visitors took away such a message. The risk that visitors take away a message from an exhibition that was not intended by the organisers is not new. A longitudinal study (Pekarik and Schreiber 2012) of Smithsonian visitors found that visitors tended to leave a museum with the same 'schemas' or expectations that they arrived with, museum text and displays have 'little effect' and visitors seek to reinforce their existing expectations. These interviewees believed that people were unhappy with the current political culture and wanted to see change:

> P105: That currently people aren't too happy with it, to the extent where they have to have a question like, 'Does your voice count?' It's come to the point where people don't actually trust that question, where they can't actually say, 'Yes, it does'. It's not actually very democratic at all.
> P104: Each generation has something to say about the system and what they don't like. It's probably the older the people, the builders seem to be the most happy and then it gets worse as it gets younger.
> *Male, aged 18–24, former teacher,*
> *now a postgraduate student in Masters of Art Therapy, Australian (P105)*
> *and female, aged 35–44, student, Swiss (P104)*

In addition to taking the key message of the exhibition from the visitors' comments, it is possible that these visitors were also expressing their cynicism towards politicians. An interesting finding was the low 'no message' response regarding the message of the *Power of 1* exhibition. Smith's (2016a, 2016b, 2017) study of museum and heritage site visitors across three countries found 26% of people took away 'no message' from the exhibitions. In contrast, only 6.1% of visitors to the *Power of 1* said there was no message, suggesting there was higher engagement from the participatory exhibition compared with conventional exhibitions. In the following quote, P1 could not recall any specific messages about Australian democracy from the exhibition but did feel that the exhibition helped him to recall aspects of the different generations:

> P1: You know, in a funny way I don't take away any particular messages. That's not really in a big way what the exhibition's trying to do because the characterisations of the generations were drawn from that recent survey. But they were relatively mild. There were images that were evocative. But I didn't take away messages as such. It helped me recall and brought to mind—well, mindfulness—some things.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

Visitors shared deeply engaged responses to the *Power of 1*. The high proportion of messages relating to the key themes (as defined by organisers) and the low 'no message' responses demonstrate that participatory exhibitions that rely on and draw upon the personal experiences of

visitors seem to help visitors to make meaning from the experience more than conventional exhibition approaches. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Table 6.20. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'What messages about Australian democracy do you take away from this exhibition?'

Q13: What messages about Australian democracy do you take away from this exhibition?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	To participate/engage, your voice is important	25	25.3
	Freedom of speech, people are allowed to have their say	20	20.2
	Changing nature of democracy throughout history and between generations	16	16.2
	Changing nature of democracy and the power of your voice within it	11	11.1
	That people want to see changes and are unhappy with current political culture and leadership	8	8.1
	That generations and society change (non-political), positive/neutral comment	7	7.1
	No messages/couldn't recall	6	6.1
	That generations and society change (non-political), negative comment	3	3.0
	Trialling a new exhibition concept/to attract young people	2	2.0
	That people are stupid	1	1.0
	Total	99	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	41	
Total		140	

6.4.14 Q14. What meaning does an exhibition like this have for contemporary Australia?

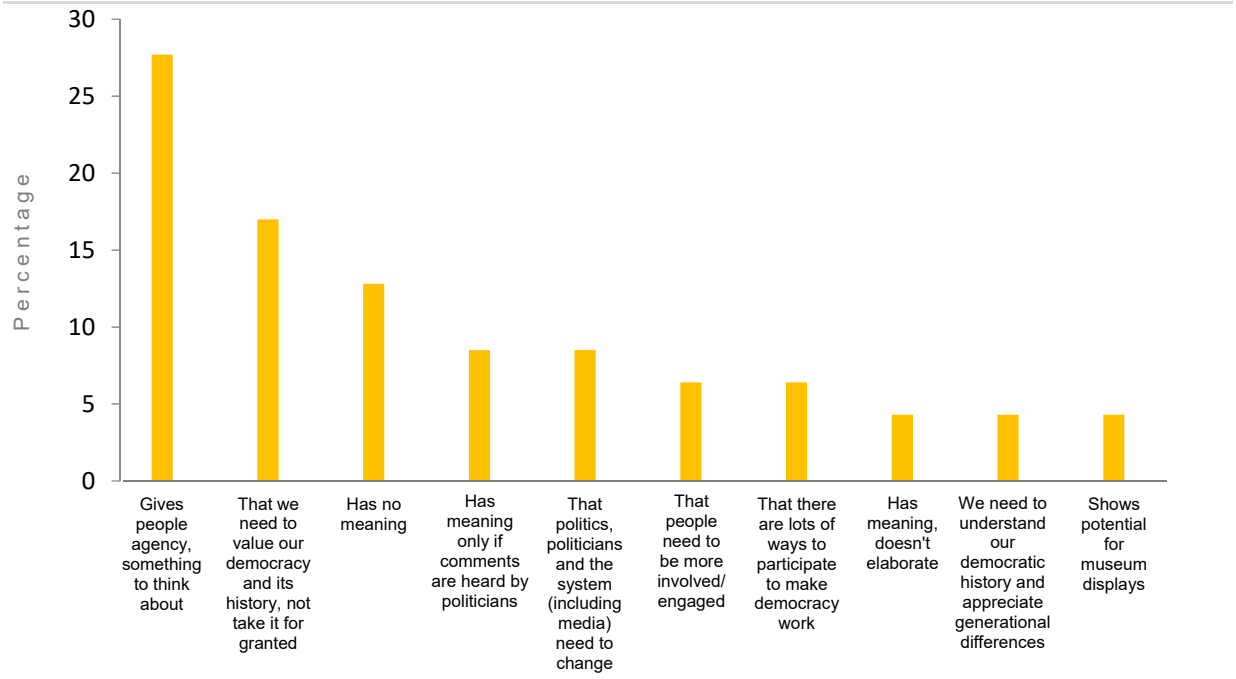


Figure 6.14. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'What meaning does an exhibition like this have for contemporary Australia?'

Drawing towards the end of the interview, many of the interviewees were ready to move to other exhibits at MoAD; thus, the question 'What meaning does an exhibition like this have for contemporary Australia?' was answered by a third of interviewees. However these answers provided insight into the meanings that people took away from the exhibition specifically as they relate to contemporary Australia. Figure 6.14 and Table 6.21 show that the most frequently given answer by more than a quarter of interviewees (27.7%) was that the exhibition activated visitor and citizen agency, suggesting a socially responsible role for museums beyond their institutions and in broader society:

> P1: Oh, I think it's quite important that people are allowed a voice. *I think it's very interesting to see a museum allowing people a voice rather than being a didactic sort of educational process.* So, I think it's very important in a time when people are becoming very cynical about having their voices heard that people in such an evocative place are allowed in a very modern way in an old building to be allowed to speak.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P106: I think it's really quite important. One of the problems that we face when I look at my children who are even less political than me because I think they feel that they don't have a voice. They feel they're just one in many. So I think these sorts of things are important to show that it does count. It's interesting that in the last two parliaments, we've had minority governments and as I was growing up and in my middle age that virtually never happened. So you got a direction and then there was a difference with the other side. Now it's all the operation of government has become very messy and there is not a lot of

> differentiation between the two sides. I think these sorts of things are very important to try—maybe it's divisive—but to get more people to realise that they do have a role and a responsibility. Then maybe we can get back to the good old days. I thought I'd never say that (laughs). Actually having a difference between the two sides of parliament.
> *Male, aged 55–64, retired, Anglo-Australian*

> P142: It's a wake-up call and it makes people think again of what's happening and whether I should be taking a more active role in trying to reform, reconstitute, reinvigorate our political system.
> *Male, aged 45–54, doctor, Caucasian*

> P139: It sort of means that politicians can listen to us more, that they sort of hear what we're talking about. It's good that we can all say what we're thinking about them, yeah.
> *Female, aged under 17, household occupation academic, Whitebread Anglo*

The above comments demonstrate how museums, through participation, can increase their relevance and respond to arguments to meet their social responsibilities both inside and outside their buildings (Carpentier 2011b; Fleming 2013). A smaller proportion of visitors (6.4%) provided similar responses, including that people needed to be more engaged and involved in politics. In the *Power of 1*, participatory experiences promoted democratic engagement, encouraged activism and demonstrated the value of participation. Slightly less than one in five visitors (17%) said the meaning of the exhibition for contemporary Australia was that it needed to value democracy and its history and not take it for granted:

> P140: I mean, I think the real danger for Australia, as one of the longest-established democracies in the world, is that people get less engaged and take it for granted, treat it like, you know, a ritual that doesn't mean very much for them to vote, and seeing that there are still questions that they have to engage with and things to consider is useful. So anything that makes people more active as citizens is good.
> *Female, aged 45–54, academic, Whitebread Anglo*

> P56: Obviously the results, the findings, potentially have a meaning for people, for decision-makers, for politicians and so on. And I guess it should make the majority of people realise that although we take a lot for granted that democracy is precious and there are different dimensions to it. We may not think we're participating in anything terribly political but then many of the things we do are political.
> *Female, aged 55–64, finance executive, Anglo*

Some visitors (4) took the opportunity to restate their concerns that the visitors' comments should be forwarded to politicians and stated that the exhibition only had meaning for contemporary Australia if the visitor comments were forwarded to politicians. This is different from museum professional M9's caution that visitors would only participate if they could 'leave their mark'. These visitors wanted their contributions to be viewed within the museum and beyond its walls by decision-makers:

> P112: This comes back to the question of what the institution is going to do with those responses. That's important because if it just puts it on and collects the responses, well, what's the point of that? Are they sharing the information back to politicians? Are they going to use it in some way to say feed it back to MPs and say that's what people want? Because if people contribute, they want to see that it's meaningfully used.

Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Australian English

The strong desire for visitors' contributions to be forwarded to politicians was a theme throughout the interviews. In particular, P136's comments (below) about the need for 'the powers that be' to see the visitors' contributions highlighted this theme. He expanded on the previous comment because he was demonstrating deep engagement with the *Power of 1*'s historical content (i.e., women winning the right to vote in the Boomer Room), visitors' contributions (i.e., relating to same-sex marriage) and messages of the exhibition (i.e., that your voice counts). This was a sophisticated synthesis by a visitor who did not conform completely to M8's forecast (Chapter 5) that 'educated, middle-class' visitors would be most comfortable making meaning from and participating in the exhibition. P136 demonstrated personal meaning making and the potential value of layered content from multiple sources within participatory experiences:

> P136: Nothing, if nothing gets done about it really. If no-one comes and sees it and knows that there's an actual issue and the majority of people want a certain, then if nothing happens …
> *RC: So what would you like to happen with the material in there? Who would you like to see it?*
> P136: Ah, the powers that be. Just … it's well documented that 65–75% of Australians want same-sex marriage but they're still like, 'No, no'.
> P136: Well, it's going to be the same where, you know, Aboriginals voting and stuff like that. It's like they were looking at thinking about it. That would have been a thing about people giving them the right to vote and everything like that, you know, and now it's commonplace, you don't even talk about it. In 20 years' time, it's going to be the exact same thing with this [same-sex marriage]—we're just delaying the inevitable.
> P136: The same with giving women the right to vote and everything like that. And, it's like, we're just going to be looking back at those, like at this particular point, and saying, 'Well that's the exact same situation. If we'd done it now or in 10 years it's not going to make any difference because it's going to happen', you know.
> *Male, aged 25–34, massage therapist, Australian (P136)*

That the different style of exhibition had meaning for Australia was mentioned by only two visitors. However, the context of the exhibition was mentioned by other visitors who noted the significance of the exhibition for Old Parliament House, the museum venue. This shows the value of 'citizen experts' and is another example of why visitors should not be underestimated:

> P12: For contemporary Australia, I think this is relevant because this is looking at this as a museum, as Old Parliament House as an artefact, as a total artefact, you know. And I guess there is a connection there. There is an exhibition like this, you go, 'Hang on a second, now I can relate to that (Old Parliament House), to this, the larger exhibition'.
> *Male, aged 55–64, engineer, first generation Australian and Italian origin*

> P119: That there are other challenging ways that exhibitions can be done, so that's more for the [museum] sector, I suppose. That we don't have to lock our historical buildings and things in that period of time. That we can give them new meanings and give them contemporary contexts that fit our … what's happening today. And that's really important, I think. I mean the answer doesn't always have to be a purpose-built centre for this, or a purpose-built centre for that. That there's a lot that you can do with the fact that, you know, the exhibition is in that building, and sometimes it's really great to critically engage with that as part of your, you know, defining who you are today.

Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal

Slightly more than one in 10 (12.8%) interviewees believed that the exhibition had no meaning for contemporary Australia and two visitors said there was meaning but did not elaborate. This question was at the end of the interviews, and some interviewees were losing interest in a question that required some deep thinking. Some of the responses were flippant, such as P113 and P114, who stated 'oooh, that's deep' and 'that's weird, are we in contemporary Australia now?' Others were perhaps trying to distance themselves from the visitors' comments that conflicted with their own views:

> P61: Well, I think Australian democracy is in a fairly parlous state at the moment but I don't get that from that room. What I get from that room is that there are differences with different generations but things have definitely … oh, it's very confusing right now. It's not particularly healthy at the moment, our democracy. Sorry, it's how I feel.
> P59: Like mum said, I was just faffing about in each room. No, I didn't really take that. We were just looking at the visuals, really.
> *Female, aged over 65, public servant, Anglo (P61)*
> *and female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo (P59)*

The majority of visitors interviewed were able to make associations between the experience and content of the *Power of 1* with contemporary Australia. For example, important and timely ideas of agency, active citizenship, participation, engagement, the required systemic changes and a gratitude for Australia's democratic history were identified and connected with present experience.

Table 6.21. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'What meaning does an exhibition list this have for contemporary Australia?'

Q14. What meaning does an exhibition like this have for contemporary Australia?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Gives people agency, something to think about	13	27.7
	That we need to value our democracy and its history, not take it for granted	8	17.0
	Has no meaning	6	12.8
	Has meaning only if comments are heard by politicians	4	8.5
	That politics, politicians and the system (including media) needs to change	4	8.5
	That people need to be more involved/engaged	3	6.4
	That there are lots of ways to participate to make democracy work	3	6.4
	Has meaning, didn't elaborate	2	4.3
	We need to understand our democratic history and appreciate generational differences	2	4.3
	Shows potential for museum displays	2	4.3
	Total	47	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	93	
Total		140	

6.4.15 Q15. Do you think this style of exhibition, in which visitors contribute, is an effective approach?

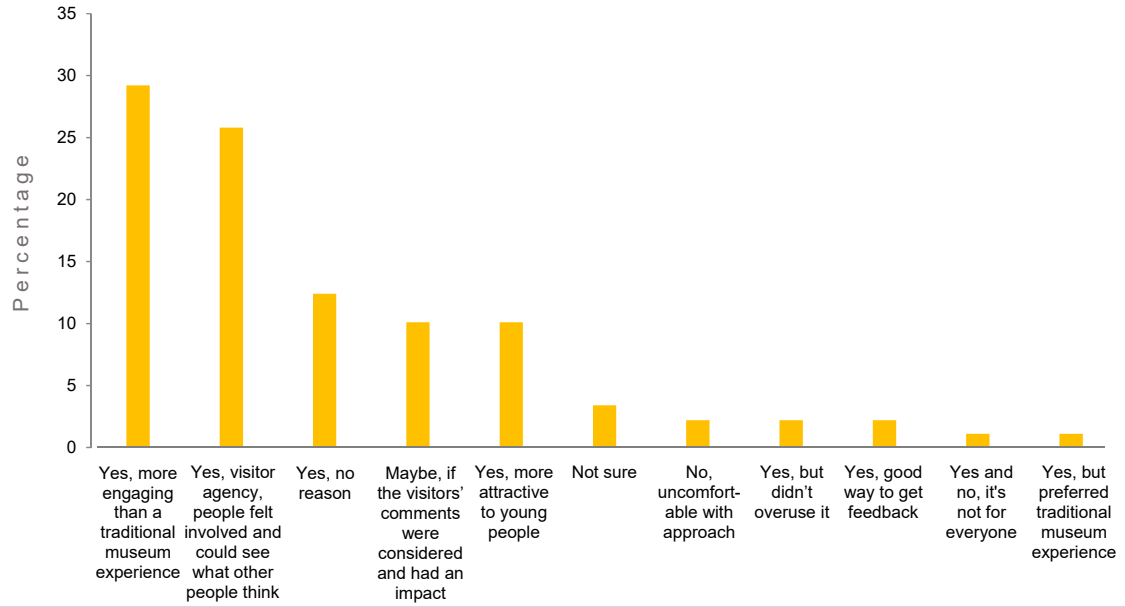


Figure 6.15. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Do you think this style of exhibition, in which visitors contribute, is an effective approach?'

Nearly four in five (79.6%) interviewees unconditionally agreed that the participatory style of exhibition in which visitors contribute was an effective approach (see Figure 6.15 and Table 6.22). Of this proportion, the most frequent explanation given (29.2%) contrasted with what could be described as traditional museum experiences. The answers below further suggest that traditional museum experiences were perceived by these visitors as passive and static, lacking engagement, distancing the visitor and limited in their ability to stimulate new ways of thinking or acting:

> P5L: Yes, because it actually *makes you think* about what you're doing, *rather than just walking past and reading or not reading as the case may be*. It helps to engage.
> P4L: I'd agree with that. I think when you encourage people to engage, when you see things and read things that people have said, it makes you think a bit more about what your own thoughts are and how you might want to see things change.
> *Female, aged 25–34, retail, white Australian (P5L)*
> *and female, aged 25–34, ESL teacher, white Australian (P4L)*

> P71: What I found interesting was the different learning styles. It's *not just using a visual*. They were getting engaged with their minds and their hands. So I think then they—the children—get the message a lot stronger. And we did too. We were enjoying our reminiscing.
> *Female, aged 45–54, public servant, mixed race*

> P98: I think it's good because you can really touch things and you can go closer. *You don't have to stand a metre away from it* because you're getting more into it.
> *Female, aged 18–24, manufacturing, Columbian tourist*

> P130: Yes, I was saying before ... otherwise it's *just a static display*. You go, 'Oh, that was a nice building we went to see, Old Parliament House'. You don't walk away with anything. This one, it's fun, you get to write on the walls.
> *Male, aged 55–64, property managers, white Caucasian*

> P137: I think it gives people … it integrates people more when they can have a contribution, rather *than just looking at something* and not being able to make a contribution.
> P138: Yeah.
> *RC: So can you just tell me a little bit more about that? So what would just looking at it …*
> P137: Well, I suppose you walk in, you look at it, and you just walk away.
> P138: It's a static display. We've just been to the Portrait Gallery and you *just sort of whizz around and pick out what you like,* but you know? Although it didn't work with me (laughs). This forces you to engage a lot more.
> P137: Yeah, that's true. More engagement, I guess, more involvement. It was sort of, made a small contribution.
> *Male, aged 55–64, health care, European (P137)*
> *and male, aged 45–54, health care, Anglo Saxon (P138)*

> P142: Because it *made me think rather than just observe*. So I sat down in the chamber today and I observed but it didn't really make me think about my role in politics. But the exhibition here, which was interactive, made me think about my role in politics.
> *Male, aged 45–54, doctor, Caucasian*

Many of these responses used the word 'just' when they contrasted participatory and traditional museum experiences. This word was used to preface traditional experiences throughout the interviews, suggesting museum experiences were perceived as inadequate or somehow passive. Note also that the visitors said 'thinking' and not 'learning'. This arose from the participatory

invitation to answer a question, as P96 stated, 'I will remember it, when you ask me something I will try to recollect the things and I will try to make it into a sentence in a way that stays in my mind *instead of a random walk*' (female, aged 25–34, engineer, Indian). P134 asserted that the questions and the invitations to answer them made him think:

> P134: Like I said, you get a chance to express your views and your individuality. When somebody asks you questions like this, you think about yourself, 'What's really my opinion?' Most of the time we delay that kind of a thinking, and this sort of … it creates a feeling that you should think. So yeah, this is useful. We don't think unless somebody asks us a question.
> *Male, aged 25–34, computer scientist, Indian tourist*

The exhibition, in particular the participatory approach gave visitors an opportunity—a space—to reflect and a prompt through which to think. While this can overlap with 'learning', subtly it is a different approach and supports the work of several scholars (S. Macdonald 1990; Sandell 2002a; Smith 2015, 2017), who questioned the heavy reliance on learning as a reason for visiting museums. These aspects will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The next most frequent response (25.8%) as to why the style of exhibition was effective related to visitor agency—the opportunity for visitors to feel involved and to view what other 'ordinary people' think. This response demonstrated the importance that visitors place on being respected, connected and free and equal partners in the museum experience:

> P16: Because we strongly believe that we are all capable, competent people who have voices and do need to be heard and not just to be talked to.
> *Female, aged 35–44, business owner, Aussie (P16)*

> P10: It's a way of feeling part of the process. It's beneficial to make an exhibition like that because you've actually got some sort of input.
> *Male, aged 35–44, defence, UK*

> P76: And when you read about others and you see people are actually sharing with you, you're not alone by yourself … especially the last one [Tally Room].
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

> P108: Yes, I think so. It allows you to write what you want to write. It doesn't have set options so you can choose from anything that's on your mind, what you want to say. You can do it yourself. It's also … you don't need to go through a long process or anything, you can just write it down when you're walking past. People don't always want to go through a whole survey or anything.
> *Female, aged 18–24, professional, multicultural*

Note P108's response to the agency and respect the project shared with visitors and her support for the freedom to participate on her terms and in an unstructured way without 'set options'. Many museum participatory experiences can be highly structured to retain control. Being able to 'set it free' and challenge the rigid, strict and controlling culture of museums was an intention of the *Power of 1* exhibition. For one in 10 interviewed visitors (10.1%), the open and participatory approach of

the *Power of 1* was effective because it attracted and engaged young people, which is a requirement if museums are to remain relevant now and in the future:

> P23: Yes, well, for younger ones that's going to be more appealing to them than looking at old chairs in there, in their mind.
> *RC: So do you think it's the content or the way ...*
> P23: The way it's presented, the way it's exhibited. It's attractive to younger minds.
> *Female, aged 55–64, secondary teacher, Anglo*

> P63: Yes, and I think it will become more and more so. Again, just because of the impact that technology has had on the way we live our lives generally, I think people are going to have a growing expectation that they will have an opportunity to participate in things like this. It's certainly not the first exhibition I've attended that invites participation. Certainly the ones I've attended that have invited more participation than just standing and looking have generally been targeted at children. But I think as those children grow up and still enjoy participating, they're going to demand more and more of that.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

These visitors' views of young people align with those of the museum professionals who predicted that the *Power of 1* would attract a younger audience and that young people were more likely to participate. However, further analysis of the interview transcripts of the *Power of 1* visitors found that visitors in all age categories participated and participatory experiences were new to all age groups interviewed. Visitors under the age of 17 were the most likely to participate and were most likely to participate in more than one interactive. The typical museum visitors aged 35–44 were the second most likely age group to participate.

Another group (14.5%) of interviewees conditionally agreed that participation was effective. For instance, around one in 10 visitors interviewed (10.1%) indicated that they thought participation was an effective approach but only if the visitors' comments were considered by and had an effect on decision-makers. This was a continuing theme throughout the interviews, and usually meant that the comments should be forwarded to politicians, but other decision-makers were also noted:

> P1: Yes and no. I think a museum actually engaging with people's perceptions is a fantastic thing to do. What might be done with that, I don't know … so in terms of a much broader conversation in Australian society about how to make your voice heard and how you determine what matters, yes, it's important. In terms of an individual exhibition, well, let's see what gets done with what comes out of it.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P30: I think so. I'm not sure what you're going to do with the outcomes of it but I'd like to see that and how effective that is … the next stage. But, you know, to get this information straight from the horse's mouth, where people have not done the survey in the sense of a normal survey, but they've come in and just been in here, thought about how lucky they are perhaps and then had a go. It will be interesting to see what comes out of that, and how it's presented to politicians or those people. For example, Christopher Pyne, when you talk about education and the cuts.
> *RC: So you'd like to see the feedback presented to government?*
> P30: Oh, I think so. You should get the PM to have a go [participating in the exhibition]. And then they'll realise how you've actually collated the data.
> *Female, aged 55–64, Member of Parliament, Australian/Italian*

For P30, the context of Old Parliament House made the experience of participation more meaningful and prompted visitors to 'have a say':

> P30: I think people have gone through and had a look at stuff and wandered through and thought, 'Hey, you've come a long way'. I suppose it's a time when you sit and you're focusing on government, you're focusing on decisions that were made in the past and might be remade in the future. If you're sort of thinking about remembering stuff back to Whitlam and all that other stuff at my age then I think that just focuses you. It makes you want to actually have a say.
> *Female, aged 55–64, Member of Parliament, Australian/Italian*

> P52: I hope so. I hope that when the people say what they think and write their opinions down that it makes something happen.
> *Male, aged 18–24, nursery teacher, German tourist*

> P117: I think as long as people can feel that their voice counts, you know, that these bits of information, that people are taking their time to think about and write down, are not just going to be shredded at the end of it, with no-one addressing it, no-one reading it. Cause I mean, you know, I don't doubt for a second that some people, even the majority of people, would have put a lot of time and thought into what they're writing. So you'd want to know that that counts, that that voice counts.
> *Female, aged 35–44, technician, Anglo*

P117's point that visitors had put time and thought into their contributions to the exhibition and their hope that politicians would see what people thought provides a strong sense that this visitor is expressing a bigger discord about being ignored in society. Her comments show that museums could and should take seriously their potential responsibility as role models to encourage people to participate more fully in society. This risk of token participation will be explored further in the discussion in Chapter 8.

Other conditional acknowledgements that this style of exhibition was effective were stated by less than one in five (14.5%) visitors. P36 felt that the low visitor numbers to the exhibition could mean that the approach was not effective, stating, 'Depends how many people are visiting, actually. Now it's quite quiet, so I'm not sure' (female, aged 18–24, student, Dutch tourist). P107 was unsure whether the participatory style was effective because not everyone wanted to or felt comfortable participating in a museum:

> P107: Yes and no because you don't get people like me commenting. It's only people who feel strongly about wanting to write a comment whether it be negative or positive. I think there'd be a lot of people in the middle, like myself, who would just want to be there and look at it.
> *Male, aged 25–34, doctor, Caucasian*

P112, a public servant, was cautious to recommend participation for all museum experiences because it would not suit all topics and outcomes, especially if there were defined learning outcomes:

> P112: It comes back to what your intent is. It's useful to encourage people if you want them to think more deeply about something. That can be a good provocation. But if your intention is to teach how the electoral system works in Australia then that's not going to work.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Australian English*

Two visitors cautioned that the style of exhibition was effective but should not be overused. For example:

> P105: I think it is but it depends on what the exhibition is. So for something like this, it's about involvement. It's important for the exhibition to be involving. But if it's something about private lives of old prime ministers, you wouldn't need to be too personally involved in that.
> *Male, aged 18–24, former teacher,*
> *now a postgraduate student of Masters of Art Therapy, Australian*

Three visitors said they were unsure if the exhibition style was effective. Another two visitors did not think the style of exhibition was effective and felt very uncomfortable with the participatory approach, in particular the other visitors' comments. For instance:

> P39: I haven't left anything here at all because it angers me. And I'm not contributing something to this because I'm uncomfortable. I had a look. I got to the end and my anger tells me to leave because I'm not impressed with the views of the modern generation.
> *RC: Do you agree with that?*
> P38: Definitely.
> *Male, aged 55–64, dole, Anglo (P39)*
> *and female, aged 55–64, dole, Anglo (P38)*

One visitor (P2L) thought the style of exhibition was effective but preferred traditional museum exhibitions. She had participated in several of the interactives and preferred the written ones. P2L and her friend had read all the summaries of each generation and found them interesting and humorous, in particular the representation that 'the younger generations [were] being least politically engaged'. Earlier in the interview, P2L expressed frustration that the boomer recording had not worked for her and she was not able to find her recording on the iPod kiosks. When asked how she felt when she visited the exhibition, she said she was interested in the room recreations for each generation, 'the realia' and the concepts. P2L was comfortable reading other people's views with which she disagreed, stating, 'I think that when there were things that I didn't like that was very interesting. I was thinking how foolish people are not to understand how our democracy works'. The feeling during the interview was very positive, and P2L stated that she 'liked having a voice or to at least con myself that I'm having a voice. Ha!' However, ultimately P2L preferred conventional museum exhibitions:

> P2L: In a sense, I prefer downstairs where I can listen to protest music. Compared to other things that we've seen today—we've only been here for a little while—I thought the cartoon exhibition and the democracy in action stuff ... I guess that's because that's my generation and I like to see that voice.
> *Female, aged 55–64, education, Convict Australian*

Above, P2L expressed her preference for the traditional curatorial or authoritative voice. However, it is noteworthy that nearly 80% of interviewees expressed their support for the inclusion of visitor voices and, specifically, participation into the museum because the experience was more engaging and effective. The portrayal by visitors (as well as some museum professionals) of traditional museum experiences as passive, static, distancing and limited and the perception that participation represents opposing characteristics will be explored more fully in Chapter 8.

Table 6.22. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Do you think this style of exhibition is an effective approach?'

Q15 Do you think this style of exhibition is an effective approach?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Yes, more engaging than a traditional museum experience	26	29.2
	Yes, visitor agency, people feel involved and you could see what other people thought	23	25.8
	Yes, no reason	11	12.4
	Maybe, if the visitors' comments were considered and had an impact	9	10.1
	Yes, more attractive to young people	9	10.1
	Not sure	3	3.4
	No, uncomfortable with approach	2	2.2
	Yes, but don't overuse it	2	2.2
	Yes, good way to get feedback	2	2.2
	Yes and no, it's not for everyone	1	1.1
	Yes, but preferred traditional museum experience	1	1.1
	Total	89	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	51	
Total		**140**	

6.4.16 Q16. Would you recommend this exhibition to a friend?

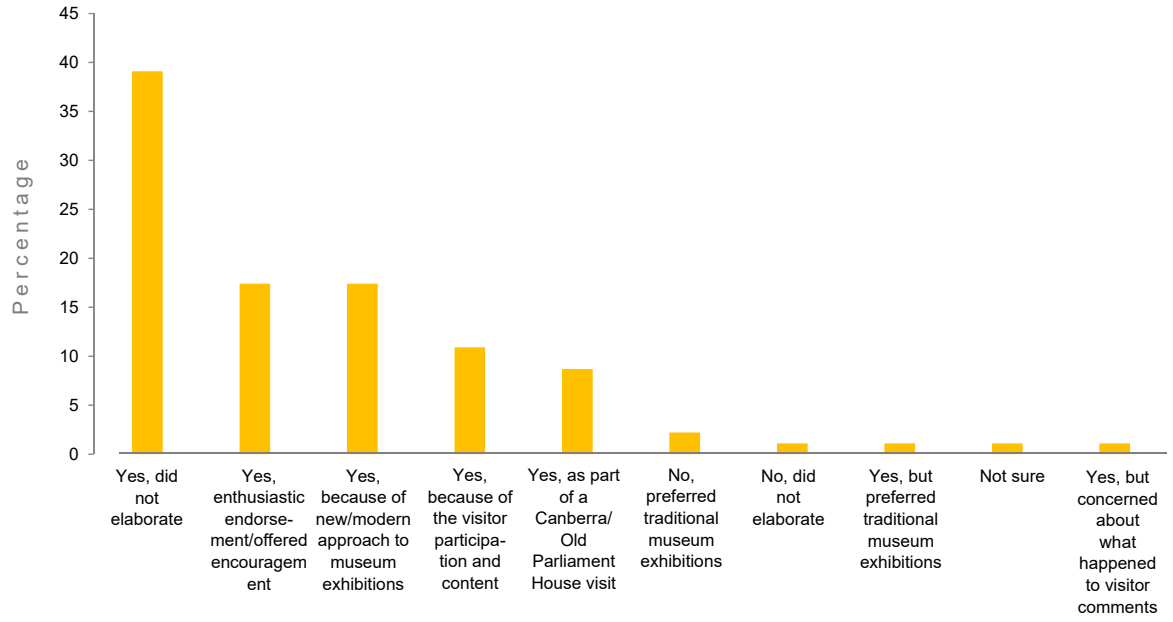


Figure 6.16. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Would you recommend this exhibition to a friend?'

In response to question 16, nearly all (95.7%) interviewed visitors said yes they would recommend the exhibition to a friend (see Figure 6.16 and Table 6.23). The most frequent response (39.1%) was yes without additional elaboration, or an enthusiastic endorsement of the exhibition with encouragement to continue creating similar exhibitions:

> P134: Definitely, yes. Next time when I'm coming here I'm bringing my family here, and I will bring them here. Continue on as you're doing, it's lovely.
> *Male, aged 25–34, computer scientist, Indian tourist*

> P67: I'd recommend it. I've been really pleased. There was a review in one of the tourist things saying this [Old Parliament House] is not so good. It said they were trying to make themselves into a museum or something but I think it's a lot better than I thought it would be.
> *Female, aged 55–64, teacher, Anglo*

> P96: We should have a similar thing in my country [India]. It is a strong, democratic country. When I go back, I will compare. Maybe I can give some suggestions so I can know how my country has evolved in democratic things.
> *Female, aged 25–34, engineer, Indian*

> P116: Yeah, I'd recommend it to almost my whole school. I'd say, 'Go into this exhibition, you'll find out it's pretty cool and a lot of stuff'.
> *Male, aged under 17, household occupation technician, Anglo*

Nearly one in five visitors (17.4%) said they would recommend the *Power of 1* exhibition to a friend because of its new and/or modern approach to museum exhibitions, including interactivity, its appeal to young people, its contrast with the heritage building and its visually creative design. For example, take P12's response and his use of the word 'just' to describe traditional museum experiences:

P12: Surprising, surprising. As I walked through I thought, ok sure, you can take the tour and you can walk around if you wish and you can look at particular things and, um, you know that's fine. But I think this was very valid, very relevant in the sense that as a connecting point with other people to have something different to look at, *rather than just a dry artefact.*
Male, aged 55–64, engineer, first generation Australian and Italian origin

P7: It's good because you go around and you're looking at the old way then you go in there and you go, 'Oh, that's goooood. It's a break'. And it's good in this building because you got new Parliament House and you go and it's all nice and modern and you go here and you're walking about and you go 'wow'. This is different. It gives you a break. And I also noticed the kids are happy to go in and touch things and do things and that's good, especially when you've got young kids they get bored. It's good. Keep it up.
Female, aged 45–54, defence, Aussie

P98: It was really nice and the things were really good, they go together. It's really creative.
RC: Which bits were creative?
P97: The last one [Tally Room].
P98: The shoes were good as well. Actually, every room is really good.
Female, aged 18–24, manufacturing, Columbian tourist (P98)
and male, aged 18–24, manufacturing, German tourist (P97)

P119: Because it was interesting and different. I felt like it was a different thing on the Canberra cultural scene and that it allowed for difference.
Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal

P141: I think it's just, what I quite like about the Gen Y Room is, you know, like obviously the iPhone and it's quite modern and I think it's just fun to be able to, you know, do something like that, and I like the different styles in the different rooms. I think, you know, if you were to come with your parents, there's something for everyone.
Female, aged 25–34, events producer, German Taiwanese

One visitor noticed that there were other new approaches to museum exhibitions within MoAD:

P79: I like the new things in here, whether like that [*Power of 1*] and the new things in the Play Up kids space.
Male, aged under 17, household occupation public servant, Aussie

One in 10 visitors interviewed (10.9%) said they would recommend the exhibition because of the opportunity to view and contribute visitor content:

P104: Yes because you can say, you can hear your voice.
P105: Yep, you can speak your mind.
P104: A lot of people are disillusioned by politics and it's a more positive, interactive way. It's not too political, you don't need to understand the full system or you don't have to understand how it exactly works to be able to be involved. You don't need to be half a politician to be able to come and understand. Anyone can come and have a look and you don't need to have a degree in politics or whatever.
Female, aged 35–44, student, Swiss (P104)
and male, aged 18–24, former teacher,
now a postgraduate student in Masters of Art Therapy, Australian (P105)

P142: Because I think that it's important that anyone who is a thinking person does actually think about one of the most important roles we have, and that's our political role, rather than just taking it at face value, as I think most people do.
Male, aged 45–54, doctor, Caucasian

> P52 and P51: Yeah …
> P51: Because I think it's a little bit modern but you see very interesting things.
> P52: Every person has the chance to say his opinion.
> *Male, aged 18–24, nursery teacher, German tourist (P52)*
> *and female, aged 18–24, nursery teacher, German tourist (P51)*

> P4L: Speaking as someone who is not Australian [a Canadian], I'd recommend it to other non-Australians so that can see maybe what Australians think of their own country.
> P3L: I have a number of friends who are interested in domestic politics and I think it would be something that they would enjoy and possibly have a lot to say about.
> *Female, aged 25–34, ESL teacher, white Australian (P4L)*
> *and female, aged 25–34, teacher, Canadian (P3L)*

The enthusiasm for the exhibition was not shared by eight visitors (8.1%), who stated they would only recommend the exhibition as part of a visit to Canberra and Old Parliament House. This may suggest that these visitors did not think the exhibition would be enough of a drawcard in its own right. Or perhaps these visitors appreciated that the contemporary experience was presented among the history of Old Parliament House. The following three visitors expressed discomfort with the exhibition content during their interview, and these responses were probably a polite way of saying they would not recommend the *Power of 1*:

> P101: Yes, I would. I would say to them. After walking around here [Old Parliament House] it was the first time I've actually been here, walking down to see the old prime minister's suite. I'm a bit gobsmacked at the moment, a bit in awe that this is what it used to be like. And I was a boy growing up. I've been to the new Parliament House and it's a totally different world over there compared to here. So just to see the history, I'd bring someone back here just to see the history and look at the where it started to where we are now just to get that experience.
> *Male, aged 35–44, manager, mixed race*

> P38: I would probably say that if you happen to be here, go and have a look and see what your impressions are. Rather than give my impressions to them, I'd say go have a look and we'll discuss it afterwards.
> *Female, aged 55–64, dole, Anglo*

> P107: I think in passing, yes, if you were going to come here to see everything else I'd say why not visit this exhibition.
> *Male, aged 25–34, doctor, Caucasian*

Of the four (4.3%) visitors who said they would not (or were not sure if they would) recommend the exhibition, two visitors said they preferred traditional museum or heritage building experiences, one visitor gave no explanation (although other answers during the interview indicated that he was very uncomfortable with the progressive visitors' comments in the exhibition) and two visitors did not elaborate. For example:

> P9: Probably not. I might say go and see the cartoons and while you're there, there are other things on. I wouldn't go out of my way.
> *Male, aged 25–34, public servant, Anglo*

> P65: There'd be other parts of Old Parliament House I'd recommend over it.
> *Male, aged 18–24, public servant, Anglo*

The majority (85.9%) of interviewees would recommend the *Power of 1* exhibition to a friend. These findings indicate a positive endorsement of the unconventional approach, activation of visitor agency, inclusion of visitors' contributions and views, engagement of young visitors and the attempt to do something different. The high rate of recommendations should encourage other museum professionals to experiment and open the doors of their museum to visitors' voices. Although some visitors would not recommend or would only conditionally recommend the exhibition, these visitors provided valid and valuable feedback and insight into participation and museum visitors that can assist the museum sector to improve its practice.

Table 6.23. Visitor interviewees' responses to the question, 'Would you recommend this exhibition to a friend?'

Q16. Would you recommend this exhibition to a friend?

		Frequency	Valid (%)
Valid	Yes, did not elaborate	36	39.1
	Yes, enthusiastic endorsement/offered encouragement	16	17.4
	Yes, because of new/modern approach to museum exhibitions	16	17.4
	Yes, because of the visitor participation and content	10	10.9
	Yes, but only as part of a Canberra/Old Parliament House visit	8	8.7
	No, preferred traditional museum exhibitions	2	2.2
	No, did not elaborate	1	1.1
	Yes, but preferred traditional museum exhibitions	1	1.1
	Not sure	1	1.1
	Yes, but concerned about what happened to visitors' comments	1	1.1
	Total	92	100.0
Missing	Did not answer	48	
Total		140	

6.5 Conclusion

The results of the visitor interviews demonstrate that, unlike the predictions of some of the museum professionals, including internal staff members, visitors made meaning, deeply engaged with and forged personal connections as a result of the participatory experiences in the *Power of 1*. This illustrates the value of participation as an effective interpretation approach in museums. It also

shows the potentially significant cultural and social benefits within the museum sector when change is embraced, visitors are respected and when museums accept and respect responsibilities as public institutions. To deepen the understanding of the meanings visitors make and their perceptions of participatory experiences, Chapter 7 will examine the findings from this research against a small number of visitors who agreed to be part of follow-up longitudinal study of the *Power of 1*.

CHAPTER 7: RESULTS PART C

Follow-up visitor interviews

7.1 Introduction

Conducting longitudinal research of visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition presented an opportunity to understand the value and effect of participation and to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of the largely qualitative research. Follow-up interviews with visitors some months after their visit to the exhibition and their exit interview helped to confirm or clarify the researcher's interpretations from the original visitor exit interview data, understand visitors' memories of the exhibition and gain an expanded appreciation of visitors' perceptions of participation. Longitudinal studies of visitors are uncommon in museum studies; however, several previous studies provided a framework through which to understand visitors' meaning-making and recollections. Some longitudinal studies distinguish between what is defined as episodic and semantic memories to determine the long-term influence of different museum experiences (Stevenson 1991; Anderson, Storksdieck and Spock 2007). Other studies explored if museums changed attitudes (Storksdieck 2011) and how memories were generated through conversations during museum visits (Medved and Oatley 2000). These various approaches to longitudinal research were applied to this study to better understand the value and effect of participatory museum experiences, in particular from a visitor perspective and over a period of time.

7.2 Background

Longitudinal studies of museum visitors are not commonplace in museum studies, however, those that have been undertaken found that any cognitive and affective effect that was experienced or articulated by the visitor at the time of the museum visit tended to diminish or disappear by the time of the follow-up interview (Falk and Dierking 1997; Medved and Oatley 2000). These studies, which occurred over weeks, months or years after a visit, relied on visitors' recollections and memories to understand the influence of museums. Certain memories were privileged over others to determine the depth of engagement and the effect of the visit which typically assumed that learning was the desired purpose of a museum visit. For example, some studies (Stevenson 1991) differentiated between episodic memories (e.g., time and place details and the recall of emotions experienced during exhibition visits) and semantic memories (e.g., facts and evidence from the

museum content that might lead to cognitive processing) and found that episodic memories were recalled more frequently than semantic memories. Within this context, there was an assumption that episodic memories were more easily created and recalled and therefore of less value than semantic memories (Anderson, Storksdieck and Spock 2007). However this assumes that learning is the purpose of a museum visit, a premise challenged by several scholars (S. Macdonald 1990; Sandell 2002a; Smith 2015). In other studies (Ellenbogen 2003), memories of social connections or the context of visits—their personal agenda, who they visited with, what they did and how much they enjoyed it—were recalled more often than the content of the exhibition. One study (Anderson 2003) of visitors' memories of World Expos that was undertaken 15–17 years after the event found that fewer than 20% of participants were able to describe the display they had previously observed. Other longitudinal studies (Storksdieck 2011) found there was limited, if any, ability for museums to change attitudes (which supports arguments by Pekarik and Schreiber (2012) that visitors fulfil pre-existing expectations during museum visits rather than take on new knowledge). Memories fade, they are not static and are often recalled through the prompting of a follow-up interview, and younger visitors tend to recall more details than older visitors (Ellenbogen 2002; Anderson, Storksdieck and Spock 2007). Exhibitions that forge personal connections or spark conversations with visitors are considered more memorable because they create engaging and satisfying experiences and build on existing attitudes, knowledge and interests that visitors arrive with at a museum (Medved and Oatley 2000; Falk and Storksdieck 2005). This is the context for the follow-up interviews with visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition.

This previous research suggests that visitors to the *Power of* 1 would most likely remember episodic aspects of their visit to an exhibition. Episodic aspects included the participatory nature of the exhibition, satisfaction expressed by visitors after their visit and conversations sparked both within the visiting groups—in response to other visitors' comments within the exhibition—and with imagined communities, such as the politicians that visitors assumed would review or respond to the visitors' comments (see Chapter 6). However, it was unclear whether semantic memories of the content or themes would surface or whether the activation of visitor agency through participating in an exhibition would translate to reflections on museum experiences or democratic engagement. Regardless, the chance to speak again with the *Power of 1* visitors, on this occasion with more time available than at the exit interview, was a valued opportunity. Follow-up questions were asked that sought greater insight into the interviewees' earlier comments and some of the findings from the first round of interviews (see Chapter 6), including perceptions of traditional museum experiences, conversations with imagined communities and the potential value of museum participation from a visitor perspective.

7.3 Methodology and participants

As noted in Chapter 4, visitors who participated in the exit interviews after their visit to the *Power of 1* were invited to participate in follow-up interviews. Sixteen visitors agreed to provide their contact details so that they could be contacted for a second interview some months later. Eleven visitors replied to the request to participate in a follow-up interview, which was up to 7 months after the first exit interview. This group broadly reflected the larger sample of visitor interviews, and consisted of slightly more women (7) than men (5), mostly professionals (7) and mostly aged over 35 years (8) with at least one representative from each age group. The follow-up interviews, however, had a higher proportion of people from non–Anglo-Celtic Australian backgrounds (6).

Full details of the methodology, demographics and sampling of the visitors who were interviewed are presented in Chapters 4 and 6. A summary of the demographic profile of visitors who participated in the follow-up interviews is below. Rather than categorising the follow-up interviewees as a 'participant' or 'non-participant', which does not represent the diverse ways that visitors can participate in an exhibition if they do not, for example, choose to leave a comment, it is instead noted whether the interviewee left a comment or made a contribution in the *Power of 1* exhibit:

- F1/P3: male, aged 25–34, scientist, Australian, left a comment in more than one participatory activity and reviewed multiple comments by other visitors
- F2/P63: female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo, left a comment in more than one participatory activity and reviewed multiple comments by other visitors
- F3/P26: female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese, left a comment in more than one participatory activity and reviewed comments by other visitors
- F4/P6: female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian, left a comment in a participatory activity and reviewed comments by other visitors
- F5/P48: female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African, participated in the ping-pong ballot participatory activity and reviewed visitors' comments (P48 was accompanied by her daughter who also left a comment)
- F6/P76: female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern, did not leave a comment or contribute to the exhibition but her daughter did
- F7/P58: male, aged 25–34, student, Australian, did not leave a comment in the exhibition but read other visitors' contributions
- F8/P74: female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern, left a comment in more than one participatory activity and reviewed multiple comments by other visitors
- F9/P10: male, aged 35–44, defence, UK, did not leave a comment in the exhibition but read other visitors' contributions
- F10/P1: male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo, left a comment in a participatory activity and reviewed comments by other visitors
- F11/P119: female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal, left a comment in a participatory activity and reviewed comments by other visitors.

P74's participation in the follow-up interviews was suggested by P76, her mother, who when asked about how her daughters had experienced the *Power of 1* proposed that the researcher speak directly with her eldest daughter and gave permission for the interview.

7.4 Visitor memories

7.4.1 Episodic memories

Episodic memories comprising details of time, place and associated feelings were the most frequently recalled by visitors who participated in the *Power of 1* follow-up interviews. This compares with the findings from other longitudinal studies of museum experiences (Stevenson 1991). Visitors recalled the gallery spaces, activities, other visitors' comments, exhibition design and content, their feelings about the visit and the specific social context, including who they visited with and the reason for their visit. Similar to the findings from previous longitudinal studies (Ellenbogen 2002), the youngest person interviewed, aged 16, recalled the greatest amount of detail in her episodic memories of the *Power of 1* exhibition:

> P74: I remember there were a really long corridor and each room had interactive exhibitions. I remember the one with the phone dangling, and you can record yourself, and then I remember the last room where everyone had wrote their opinions up on the wall about the government and what changes should be made. I remember one room had TVs, and the TVs were playing the old advertisements, I think it was.
> *Female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern*

Two of the interviewed visitors were confident that they remembered all details of the exhibition:

> P1: I remember everything.
> *RC: Everything?*
> P1: I remember the three rooms, the three different generations and their ways of engaging politically, which I thought was very clever, and it pops back into my memory on occasion.
> *RC: How much do you remember about the three rooms, then?*
> P1: I remember that it was a very clever way of focusing on the different forms of engagement, and I also remember how the modern, the more modern one [gen Y] particularly stuck out, given it was in that rather old, august building.
> *RC: And is there anything else you remember about, what it was about or what you did or anything like that?*
> P1: Yeah, I enjoyed reading the various bits and pieces that people had contributed. I return to those sort of themes because of the, you know, the level of discomfort many people have with the level of political discourse in the country at the moment, and I love the old building and the fact that—I'm in Canberra, so you see it [Old Parliament House] all the time. It calls your mind back to focus on that exhibition.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P76: Very much everything. The interactive stuff we did, me and my girls [her daughters, aged 13 and 16 at the time of their visit] and the settings, the rooms, each room different. Every now and then the girls remember and they talk about it …
> *RC: Can you give me an example of when they've talked about it?*

> P76: Because there was one room, where you had to, ah, respond to things. And they liked this very much. Especially the little one, she is a bit cheeky, she likes this sort of thing. She's the one who did most of the things [interactives] that needed to be done.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

However, later in their interviews, both of these visitors noted that they had forgotten aspects of their exhibition experience, demonstrating that the memories of even the most enthusiastic and confident of museum visitors faded over time:

> *RC: Do you remember if you participated in any of the interactives? Which one?*
> P1: Yes I did. I can't remember exactly what I did, strangely enough.
> *RC: So you have a memory that you did something, but you ….*
> P1: I did, but I can't remember what it was … I can't remember which format I actually used. Isn't that funny?
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P76: The activities, that's number one. The settings, because every now and then we change something in the house and we remember that this chair was on display, or the tree [message tree] it was very nice. Especially now it's [the plywood message tree] everywhere and really in fashion. We always talk about this thing, democracy, and to be honest with you I have forgotten what it [the exhibition] was about but I do remember everything else because I am more a visual person. But as for the democracy one, maybe because our country of origin [Iraq] is having some difficulties right now with these things, and because my girls are interested in history and political stuff, we talked about it.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

For P76, the visual aesthetic of the exhibition was a strong memory of the exhibition and the exhibition's theme or message was recalled only during the follow-up interview. The very act of inviting visitors to participate in a follow-up interview prompted visitors' memories of the exhibition. This highlights the challenge of seeking to understand the intermediate or long-term influence of museums and the need to acknowledge the interactive and interdependent role of the researcher (Schaffer 2000; Pachirat 2006, 2011). Once prompted, some visitors recalled many episodic details of the exhibition. Questions about democracy reminded visitors about the content and message of the exhibition that had been forgotten:

> P48: Well, it was an exhibition in relation to various time frames: the 80s, the 70s, 60s and then the more recent times of the younger generation. In essence, a celebration of the culture of the various time frames that were exhibited in the display. I think it was a worthwhile exhibition to attend, and certainly having both my husband and my daughter there, and we're all from sort of different generations. He's a boomer, I'm an X and [my daughter] of course is young. It was nice for them to see, I suppose, the pop culture of our individual eras. So I think, yeah, it was a nostalgic experience.
> *RC: And there was content in there about Australia's democracy and opportunities to leave a message and things. Do you remember any of the information about democracy?*
> P48: Yes. You mean, the things in relation to putting balls into the various … was that all part of the same exhibition, was it? I must be honest, I assumed that the three rooms of the different eras had been the exhibition rather than necessarily that adjunct. But certainly, yes, you could write a message on a board and you could put little balls into various things and yes, I do recall that.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P26: To be honest I'd sort of forgotten until I got your email to have this interview and then I started thinking about it again. I do recall how interactive it was, and that the children were able to engage with a lot of the different rooms and leave messages, I think. Yeah, so it's brought back a lot of memories, actually.
> *RC: Okay, and do you remember what it was sort of about?*
> P26: Now, I remember the different rooms that covered the different generations, and the things related to those generations and also our hopes and dreams for the future. I remember writing some words around, things around that. Yeah, they're my strongest memories.
> *RC: Do you remember there was a little bit in there about how democracy has changed?*
> P26: Yes, see, now it's starting to … piecing the puzzle together for me. Yeah, I do. And I remember thinking about it a lot afterwards, and I think some aspects I'm not so happy with, and others I am. The fact that we do live in Australia and have so much freedom but there are some things that, you know, I still question, yeah.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

The memories of two male visitors seemed to have faded more compared with the memories of other visitors who agreed to the follow-up interviews. P58 could not recall the theme or topic of the exhibition but could remember some details before the interview questions prompted his memory, and P10 could remember that the exhibition related to voting, which was a part of the *Power of 1*. Interestingly, these visitors did not participate in any of the activities in the exhibition during their visit, nor had they accompanied visitors who left a comment or contribution. This suggests that participation in a museum exhibition helps to shape memories. Further research into this concept should be undertaken with a larger sample size. Their responses demonstrated a shallow engagement with the exhibition, although it is possible that they were simply less reflective than the other interviewees:

> P58: I remember that there were three or four different areas that were based on different generations, and sort of tried to integrate technology and stuff that was available in those times to … yeah, I guess to appeal to the people who grew up in those times and their senses.
> *RC: Yeah. Do you remember anything else about the exhibition? What it was about or what you could do there or anything like that?*
> P58: I remember there was a room where you had to write stuff on the wall. I can't remember what the idea behind it was, and yeah, I vaguely remember there were some questions and you got answers on computers, I think, in one of the exhibits as well.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian*

> P10: It's quite vague now about it. I think it was just voting through the ages of national parliament. I think it was different times: the 50s, the 70s, the 90s, yeah, and to the present time. So it was how people looked at voting.
> *Male, aged 35–44, defence, UK*

According to previous longitudinal studies (Stevenson 1991) feelings form part of episodic memories, and several visitors recalled their affective experiences from the *Power of 1* and whether they related to other visitors' comments or the exhibition content, concept or technology. The participatory approach of the exhibition evoked a range of emotions from the visitor's own

comments relating to issues about which they felt strongly, or in relation to other visitors' comments that may have supported or opposed their own personal views:

> P6: I don't remember the exact wording, but I know what it was. I know what I wanted. It was a more compassionate view of our asylum seekers and bring them into the country. They'd be fabulous people to bring into the country. And I think we should. That's what it was because I feel very strongly about asylum seekers.
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian*

> P26: That was, yeah, that was empowering because, I mean, I don't know if anyone read it, but it kind of makes you feel like, 'Well, I'm writing in such a public place something that you wouldn't be allowed to do normally'. Some pretty strong thoughts around what I feel about equality. So it felt really empowering.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

> P3: I think at the time, at the time I … I can remember thinking, like, I'm quite left leaning, okay? And I can remember reading the comments and thinking, 'Oh, you know, there's a problem with society'.
> *RC: Oh really, in what way?*
> P3: I can't remember because I can't really remember what the comments were, but yeah, I can remember being irked by the … the vibe of it.
> *Male, aged 25–34, scientist, Australian*

For P3 above, he recalled how the flippant comments by young people in the exhibition had made him feel, and he wanted his generation to take more seriously their democracy and issues that were important to him and his visiting group. For several visitors, their negative feelings from their visit to the *Power of 1* were easily recalled and related to their original comments in the exit interviews. For instance, in P6's exit interview, she was angry about the portrayal of her generation of boomers as privileged, P119 was frustrated that she could not participate and P48 felt confronted by the iPod display and was intimidated by the technology. These original feelings were recalled in their follow-up interviews:

> P6: I still feel a little bit angry, really.
> *RC: Do you? Now tell me about that, because you felt that at the time. Tell me about how you felt angry and you still feel angry now ...*
> P6: Well, I just don't like the generalisations of the baby boomer, but really, I suppose I'm generalising on the younger ones too. But it's the generalisation of everything that really gets to me, you know? I don't really believe we have a voice, and I'm someone that does write to their members of parliament and you very rarely get an answer.
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian*

> P119: I went to put a ping-pong ball in the thing of whether you think the voting age should be lowered, and I noticed that lots of people had said 'no' on that particular night. And I really felt quite strongly 'yes' … And plus I could see that the yeses needed a bit of help, and there were no ping-pong balls left, so I couldn't.
> *Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal*

> P48: I don't know whether it was negative at all to the younger generation but for me, as I said, the participation of pushing the iPods to see what was on them, I found that confronting as an older person.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

Although they had enjoyed the *Power of 1* experience at the time, these visitors recalled aspects of the unconventional participatory exhibition that had challenged or discomforted them, such as the generational framework, poor maintenance and presentation of the digital interactives. Museum practitioners should take note of these potentially negative experiences that were recalled some months after their visit. These could be mitigated by increasing resourcing for maintenance and visitor services, in particular around the issue of supporting visitors to change their behaviour in exhibitions and touch or use unfamiliar technology. The social context was remembered by some visitors, particularly mothers with children accompanying their visit:

> P48: Well [my daughter] certainly enjoyed writing on the board, putting her thoughts down so that other people can view it, and she did, as I said, she did something with a tree. I can't remember exactly what it involved, but she did something on that tree and she also used the ping-pong balls. As I say, I think to her it was a really positive experience to engage in that way.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P63: I took [my daughter] back to look at it, she would have been 12 at the time.
> *RC: And how did that go, in terms of, for you going through a second time, but also your daughter having a chance to see it?*
> P63: Yeah, she was, she was really interested in it. I thought that she would really enjoy the interactive part of it, and she did. I remember her spending more time in the big room at the end, you know, the ping-pong balls and the things on the, you know, those little notes on the wall.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

> P76: Otherwise, to be honest with you, if not for the children we wouldn't have been there [at Old Parliament House]. It was just because this [topic democracy—her daughters hope to work as journalists or for Amnesty when they are older] is their interest.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

Participation—the opportunity to have a say and to read other visitors' views—was recalled in the visitors' episodic and semantic reflections, and the distinction between the two was found to be at times unclear. In part, this may be because feelings and emotions were included in the episodic classification but the visitors recalling these memories often demonstrated deep engagement with the content of the exhibition. The invitation to participate was an opportunity for visitors to express their existing attitudes, knowledge and interests. The follow-up interviews were not asking visitors to recollect newly acquired ideas from didactic museum content, but to reflect on the experience of having a voice and being exposed to other visitors' views and contributions. For instance, the following visitors recalled details of the exhibition and its participatory content. These were more likely to be episodic memories even though the interviewees showed an understanding of the aim of the exhibition:

> P63: I remember it being very interactive, so … I remember the series of funny little rooms that invited you to have some input, I suppose, on your view of Australian democracy, and that those different rooms represented the different ways that different generations communicate or prefer to communicate. And I also remember the sort of the big room at

> the end, which sort of exemplified, I guess, different ways of participating in the democratic process.
> *RC: Where do you think it [participation] worked the best?*
> P63: Well, the notes on the wall were amazing.
> *RC: The secret ballot? The ones hanging off the wall …*
> P63: Yeah, the secret ballot, yeah. It was hundreds of them. I mean, every room that I walked into seemed to have plenty of responses. There seemed to be plenty of material, but I guess it was really … the notes on the wall, it was particularly overt because they were all just kind of hanging there. You didn't sort of have to go searching through stuff to find stuff. They were just all there.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

> P6: I remember leaving a message in there [the Tally Room] and just playing with the younger generations [Gen Y Room], the one with all the phones and mobile phones and gadgets hanging there, and really thinking, well that's about right (laughs).
> *RC: The Gen Y Room, yeah, I remember you mentioning it at the time. Do you remember what the exhibition was about or anything like that?*
> P6: Yeah, it was the *Power of 1*—having your voice heard by the government, wasn't it?
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian, participated in exhibition*

In the follow-up interviews, visitors recalled episodic memories about the *Power of 1*, including the visual presentation, generational framework, interactive activities, other visitors' comments, who they visited with and their feelings about practical and content aspects of the participatory experience. Some visitors, through their episodic memories, demonstrated deep engagement with the content and aims of the exhibition up to seven months after their visit, even though these memories were considered to hold less value than semantic memories (Stevenson 1991). All visitors forgot elements of the *Power of 1* exhibition. It appears that for the visitors who did not participate, their recall was more vague than for visitors who left a comment or visited with someone who contributed, although this is an area which would benefit from further research.

7.4.2 Semantic memories

An examination of semantic memories was undertaken to assist with our understanding of the value and effect over time of participatory exhibitions. In the *Power of 1* follow-up interviews, semantic memories were expressed by visitors less frequently than episodic memories, supporting previous research into the long-term influence of museums (Stevenson and Bryden 1991). The visitors' semantic (facts and evidence) memories of the participatory approach or the content of the visitors' contributions showed deeper cognitive processing, as the interviewees synthesised their memories to make connections with the message of the exhibition, their personal experiences and values and broader issues relating to Australian democracy. For instance, semantic memories often demonstrated whether the visitor had recalled content, including the main themes or 'big idea' (MoAD 2014b) of the exhibition or evoked an understanding of different experiences and views (P48) or the need to participate (P58):

> P48: I think I said it when we were there. I think it's really important to—and particularly across the generation thing—to be able to appreciate everybody's experience, whether it be of democracy of the country generally or pop culture, or whatever it is. Those sorts of exhibitions give a window into somebody else's experience and I think that's really important.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P58: I think there's sort of a need that if you want to have a voice and be able to participate, to engage in a society or engage in something then, yeah, they need to be an active participant in that.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian*

A couple of visitors shared semantic memories when they demonstrated deep cognitive processing of what the exhibition was trying to achieve through participation and the visitor's role in that experience. These visitors articulated that the process of participation is as important as the product, as suggested by external contractor M3 (Chapter 5). These comments also support Melucci's (1989, 174) double meaning of participation—'both taking part, that is, acting so as to promote the interests and the needs of an actor as well as belonging to a system, identifying with the "general interests" of the community':

> P63: What I really liked about the exhibition and one of the reasons that I took my daughter in to see it was because it was so interactive and it really did demand that. I mean, in order to actually sort of appreciate what it was doing, you really did have to get in there and actually do something and, you know, press buttons or talk or, you know, or take a little photo or write a message or put a ping-pong ball in a thing. It sort of, you know, if you were just wandering through it and standing back you've kind of missed the point of the exhibition. And I found that quite inspiring.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

> P119: I got that sense very early on that, you know, the kind of things I was going to learn by the end of it, or the outcomes at the end of it, would largely be up to my experience and how I participated on the way through. So I got off that sense early on, that it was less of an exhibition and more of a … almost like an experiment.
> *Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal*

In a similar way, the participatory approach that activated visitor agency was recognised by P1 as also creating a role for museums in the broader community. P1 suggested the participatory approach might be used as an 'intervention' tool to 'access young people's perceptions and engage with young people' in political debate (F10/P1: male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo). The visitors above demonstrated a very sophisticated understanding of the broader intent of the exhibition and made evident the futility and error of the museum professionals' attempts to underestimate visitors and perceive them as passive (see Chapter 5), an aspect of museum practice which persists although it has been criticised by scholars for decades (Tchen 1992; Sandell 2007; Fouseki 2010).

Semantic memories are perceived to be harder to recall than episodic memories and, therefore, of greater value. However, the use of this framework to examine the long-term effect of the participatory *Power of 1* exhibition was limited, not least because it draws on the learning paradigm

and therefore elevates the role of learning (and thus the traditional role of museums) over visitor agency and meaning making. For example, the high emotional engagement with the participatory content was mostly classified as 'episodic', but it demonstrated strong personal connections with the participatory experience that is typically the result of semantic memories. This framework needed to be reconsidered, in particular for participatory exhibitions that deeply engage and personally connect visitors to participatory approaches and content. This episodic and semantic framework was also used to establish if exhibitions resulted in changes in attitudes among visitors. Visitors most frequently recollected episodic memories, and fewer visitors recalled semantic memories that were more likely to result in changes in attitudes. This is discussed in the next section.

7.4.3 Reinforcing existing attitudes

Museum practitioners consider that exhibitions can change visitors' behaviour, attitudes and understandings; however museum visitor (Pekarik and Schreiber 2012) and longitudinal (Storksdieck 2011) studies both showed that this was unlikely, and this was the case in the *Power of 1* follow-up interviews. As demonstrated in the participatory comments left by visitors to the exhibition and the interviews with visitors as they left the exhibition, many visitors were already highly engaged with politics and held strong views about politicians, political parties, social issues and current affairs. This supports Pekarik and Schreiber's (2012) finding that visitors arrive at a museum with an existing 'schema' or set of expectations and fulfil them during their visit. Rather than shaping those attitudes, the *Power of 1* offered visitors an opportunity to express, share and reflect on how their views contrasted with or supported other visitors' views.

The follow-up interviews were another opportunity for the visitors to express their pre-existing views. When directly asked if the *Power of 1* exhibition had an influence on their subsequent reflections regarding Australian politics and democracy, all but one of the follow-up interviewees stated that it had not or that it was unlikely. These visitors did not believe that museums changed their attitudes:

> P6: I never used to be interested in politics but now we're at home a lot of the time, I see a lot more of it and I just … I do think about it. It's just an unjust society. We're so well-off, we can afford to do really good stuff in regards to help and that sort of thing.
> *RC: Absolutely. And do you think any of your memories of the Power of 1 exhibition, do you think that played any part when you've been thinking about Australian democracy?*
> P6: Not terribly, I don't think.
> *RC: It's just part of what you do?*
> P6: Yes, it's part of me. Yeah, I make a lot of comments on Facebook and places and then I do write the occasional letter to the paper, which does get in every once in a while.
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian, participated in exhibition*

RC: So when you're reflecting on Australian democracy, like, obviously you're really aware of politics and politicians and democracy and stuff, at any point have you reflected on the state of Australian democracy and thought about that exhibition?
P3: No.
RC: No, it hasn't had any further reflection after you left?
P3: No, I don't think so.
Male, aged 25–34, scientist, Australian

RC: Have you, since your visit, reflected on issues associated with Australian democracy? Did your memories of the Power of 1 exhibition play a part in the reflection?
P76: Oh, we always talk about it, always. Part of the news, what's happening. Especially my eldest daughter, she is studying the European history now, about Hitler, wars and these things so most of the time we talk about these things.
RC: Do you know when you've talked about it, do you know if you've thought about this exhibition, where you've, you know, seen other people's points of views and things?
P76: To be honest, no.
Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern

RC: Have you, since your visit, reflected on issues associated with Australian democracy?
P74: Yes, I have.
RC: Is that something that you just do, that you're just interested in democracy?
P74: Yeah, yeah.
RC: So what are you interested in with Australian democracy?
P74: Now in particular, I'm interested in the turn back the boats policy. I'm really opposed to it, I don't like it at all. And I'm doing legal studies, so we've been studying that at the moment too.
RC: And do you know if you've been thinking about the Power of 1 exhibition when you've been thinking about some of those issues?
P74: No.
Female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern

P48: I think there's been a lot of matters in the press and in the media recently, which give us cause to think about democracy in our country.
RC: And did your memories of the Power of 1 exhibition play a part in that reflection at all?
P48: Not specifically, perhaps subliminally, I don't know. I didn't specifically think about that exhibition when I've been thinking about issues about democracy. I think at the time it certainly helps you think outside the square, to raise questions around, rather than just accepting what the specific areas are. But not specifically, no.
Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African

Only P26 believed that the experience of visiting the *Power of 1* had influenced how she participates in Australian democracy. P26 seemed to suggest that the message she wrote on the wall in the *Power of 1* prompted her to more actively participate in education issues and write to the responsible minister:

P26: Yeah, absolutely ... I have this notion of equality and access to education, and just through some personal experience I see large inequality and that just gets me really frustrated.
RC: So, how does it get you frustrated? How do you express that?
P26: Well, I've sent things to the education minister. I've … I'm in the process of writing to the director of the Catholic Education Office. I actually try to express my views to highlight gaps that we see in the education system, just to raise awareness. Because I think if you're at that level, sometimes you may not have some awareness, and hope that, you know, they learn from it or, you know, use people's experiences to implement positive change.

> *RC: So do you think your memories of the Power of 1 exhibition play any role in that reflection on issues, or ….*
> P26: I think that the link to, you know, what I wrote on the wall, it's almost become a passion. I don't know if it was because of the exhibition, but education and equality is a passion now that I've had children. So yeah, I guess in some ways it has, yeah.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

A reading of P26's full exit and follow-up interviews showed that she is politically active and believes strongly in the responsibility of citizens of all ages, including her children, to engage and have their say. It is possible that her assessment that 'in some ways' the *Power of 1* prompted her to actively participate could be an overreach or her simply being polite. However, it is also possible that the large number of visitors' comments in the *Power of 1* exhibition that opposed cuts to education bolstered her personal views about education, 'empowered' her to write on the graffiti wall and prompted her to write to the minister. Given that only one interviewee believed that their visit to the exhibition influenced their future reflections or actions, this finding should be treated cautiously.

The interviewees' contended that the exhibition did not change their attitudes about political participation. These visitors to the *Power of 1* were already highly engaged, knowledgeable and interested in issues of politics and democracy. They continued to reflect on issues of democratic engagement because it was a topic of interest to them, which no doubt prompted their original decision to visit MoAD at Old Parliament House. This may account for the high levels of satisfaction with the exhibition, the emotional engagement with the content and the act of participating. In fact, some visitors noted in the exit and follow-up interviews that there was an inherent element of self-selection in who attended the exhibition and, therefore, participated in the interviews. This highlights the higher than average education and social-economic status of visitors to museums, especially a museum located in Canberra:

> P63: I have kind of wondered, if you took that exhibition to different places around Australia, what sort of different responses you would get from people. So, you know, Canberra is a public service town, and it's also fairly wealthy and has a high degree of education. What kind of different responses would you get with an exhibition like *Power of 1* if you took it to, you know, some areas of remote Australia or some, you know, highly industrialised areas or, you know, small country towns, cities much bigger than Canberra, areas where there's a greater degree of cultural diversity, for example? So, yeah, I have wondered about those things.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

> P1: Yes. I read lots of them, which I thought … I'm always … having done similar sorts of research myself, I'm always interested in what people have to say about these sorts of things, and yeah, I was actually pleased to see that what is admittedly a self-selected audience, had intelligent things to say about their nation, and then I read in the newspaper yesterday about a whole lot of social media contributions to a question and answer session with some poor bastard refugee waiting for allocation for somewhere from Indonesia, and I wanted to hang my head in shame for being Australian.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P58: Yeah, I think so. I mean it's one of those hard systems in that you really don't know where, what the demographics of these responses are, and all that sort of thing. So, I mean it makes it a difficult sample, I guess, to see that it's representative of the country's perspective. You know, I don't think it could hurt, seeing the range of views and things, what people are thinking, yeah.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian*

The reason that the *Power of 1* was so successful was that it built on the existing attitudes, knowledge and interests of already politically engaged visitors. While this produced a highly satisfying and memorable experience for the visitors interviewed and accounted for the high engagement with the participatory activities, it also illustrated the exclusive and exclusionary nature of museum audiences and highlighted the need for museums, if they are to be more democratic, to attract a more diverse and inclusive audience. The benefits of increased participation—feeling connected to community, empowered to have a say and the opportunity to engage in conversations with real or imagined communities—should extend to all citizens, not simply the privileged museum goers.

7.4.4 Conversation and memory

Previous longitudinal studies (Falk and Storksdieck 2005) found that conversations were helpful in generating memories of museum experiences and making the exhibition socially and personally relevant and satisfying. Predictably, conversations at the exhibition with friends, family or staff members as well as post-visit conversations were recalled by some visitors. For example:

> P48: Only on the day with my family. We chatted a bit about the various things, which were on display and some of the crossovers. I'd introduced my daughter to The Breakfast Club—one of the visuals for the 80s was The Breakfast Club—and so we talked about that. So yeah, we talked about it on the day but not since then.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P10: Yeah, we got speaking to the person [a staff member] who was in there as well, and I remember reading the views but none comes to mind right now, but I do remember looking at those different views and attitudes towards democracy and voting.
> *Male, aged 35–44, defence, UK*

> P76: It's stuck in our heads. We actually … we … maybe because my girls are still young, so they always say, 'Oh do you remember when we did this in Canberra and visited the museum', all of this. But we forgot about the reason, what was it about, which is democracy.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

Interestingly, some conversations that took place at the exhibition were prompted by the invitation to participate or the contributions made by the interviewees or other visitors. This demonstrates that participatory experiences have the power to provoke discussion and reflection of content and ideas by requiring an immediate and personal response to the exhibition that could be later remembered:

> P119: I just said [to my sister about typing into the gen X Commodore64 keyboard an answer to the question, 'How do you participate in democracy?'], 'I can't think of anything', and she said there are lots of things to, you know, you could choose. There's the bicentennial march, there's a, and, you know, she listed off a whole heap and I saw it. Yeah, that's right, they are important things. And so I watched her then put in her memory, one of her memories, which was attending the Redfern speech, Paul Keating's Redfern speech with my dad … You know, we speak about politics at home, but I had never heard that they went there … Anyway, she said, 'No, I distinctly remember it'. And she painted the picture of the scene, and I just, apart from feeling like, 'Oh, bloody hell, I should have been there', I just thought that's really, it's really cool that these big moments have happened in our living memory.
> *Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal*

The visitors' exit interviews (see Chapter 6) suggested that, through participation, some visitors engaged in real and imagined conversations with other visitors and decision-makers. When P10 read other visitors' comments, he discovered that previous visitors shared the same views or held alternative 'viewpoints', and he also imagined future visitors could read his:

> P10: In an exhibition, yeah. Well, I guess so. I guess *in normal exhibitions it's just, you're taking in what you can see.* You look at an article and you're reading it, but this is where your sort of interaction was … and you can say, 'Oh look at that', as you can read someone else's viewpoints. Later on someone else can read yours.
> *RC: And what does that do, in terms of exchanging viewpoints?*
> P10: For me it's a trigger. It triggers someone else's viewpoints … It's your own viewpoint but I'm making you think about something else, yeah. Yeah, even something that you may have thought was insignificant, but you may find out that some other people thought it as well.
> *Male, aged 35–44, defence, UK*

Once again, several visitors in the follow-up interviews indicated that in addition to museum staff, friends and family, they participated in conversations with 'imagined audiences'. The act of leaving a comment or contribution in a public exhibition created a conversation or a way to communicate with people they did not know but who, in their minds, were politicians (dead or alive), decision-makers and other unknown visitors. In her interview, P119 elaborated on the identity of the decision-makers to whom she imagined she was speaking:

> P119: The gravity of the building wasn't lost on me either, so I still felt that perhaps, you know, if I was going to say something, that it needed to, that I was speaking to them. I was speaking to the people who I imagined would be in the building.
> *RC: So who were they? Who …*
> P119: Well, they're, you know, old, white men that make the decisions basically, you know?
> *Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal*

This expectation or desire for the visitors' contributions to be read by politicians emerged strongly from the exit interviews and was a means through which visitors assessed how genuine—or token—was the museum's commitment to participation. This concern was again expressed in the follow-up interviews:

> P63: I remember also thinking that the tone of a lot of the messages that I read, it made me think that people were almost expecting that the responses to this, to that exhibition, would kind of be packaged up and delivered to the government. Do you know what I mean? There was a sense that people wanted to be heard, they wanted their views to be heard, and they thought maybe something would be done with this information, other than *just being a part of the exhibition*.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

> P6: Oh, well I think in that [Tally] Room where you're invited to handwrite your little message on your card or whatever, yeah.
> *RC: The big Tally Room where you could write things down?*
> P6: Yes, yes.
> *RC: And what did you like about that?*
> P6: Well, I just felt like someone might look at it, someone might read it. I know I get pretty pleased if I look at some things and someone's actually said something that I would do and agreed, you know?
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian*

> P74: But I really want to know if any of the things that were written actually, you know, went through.
> *RC: Oh really, went through where? What do you mean?*
> P74: To the government or anywhere where there wouldn't be a change, to make a change.
> *Female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern*

These comments from the follow-up interviews confirmed a key finding from the exit interviews with visitors to the *Power of 1*. The participatory experience forged personal connections with the exhibition content by not only sparking conversations within groups of visitors or between visitors and museum staff, but 'imagined conversations' with future and past visitors, such as potential decision-makers and power holders, and with communities to whom visitors may not otherwise have access. This confirmed the potential value for participatory exhibitions to provoke and expand conversations—both real and imagined—that could then help to shape and recall memories of museum experiences. In this way, participation became a democratic, imagined conversation between society, individuals and the museum. It demonstrates both the value and potential of participation to the museum sector. This concept of imagined conversations will be explored more fully in Chapter 8.

7.5 Visitors' perceptions

7.5.1 Participation

The follow-up interviews were an opportunity to examine some of the key themes and visitor perceptions that emerged from the exit interviews after their visit to the *Power of 1* exhibition, including participation, Australian democracy and politics and traditional museum experiences. In the exit interviews (see Chapter 6), nearly four in five visitors (79.6%) agreed unconditionally that the participatory style of exhibition in which visitors contribute was an effective approach. Of this proportion, nearly a third (29.2%) of visitors indicated that the strengths of participation included addressing some perceived shortcomings of traditional museum experiences, including

passive/static displays and a lack of engagement or appeal, in particular for young visitors. Over a quarter (25.8%) of visitors who took part in the initial exit interviews valued visitor agency and the chance to have their say or to see other visitors' comments. A small number of visitors (2) cautioned that the participatory style of exhibition was effective but should not be overused. These two visitors who were uncomfortable with the approach did not agree to participate in the follow-up interviews; thus, their views cannot be further examined for this case study.

In the follow-up interviews, participants expressed many of the same views, demonstrating broad support and some deep reflection for museum participatory experiences, particularly when utilised for relevant topics, such as democratic engagement as was used in the *Power of 1*:

> P63: I mean, a key objective of that exhibition is surely to have people think about the role that they themselves play in Australia's democracy. If you're *just presenting them* with a series of images and, you know, written information, for some people that doesn't invite them to engage in the process and they, therefore, don't think about that. It's sort of just like they're being presented with a piece of information and, I would think, that that's actually undermining the entire purpose of the exhibition because you're not actually inviting that person to participate. So, once you do invite them to participate, you do … you are underscoring the point that the whole exhibition is trying to make, but you can extrapolate that to other exhibitions of, you know, other kind of artistic or, you know, cultural things where the whole point of those things is for people to be able to engage with material.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

> *RC: When you think of the Power of 1 exhibition now, how does it make you feel?*
> P74: Erm, powerful in a sense, because you could … it was a place where *your opinions were allowed to be shared* and no-one really had a say. You just say whatever you want.
> *Female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern*

> P1: [The visitors] were using it to reflect on the state of affairs, and I thought that was interesting that it's *not your normal museum practice to have that room for reflection*. And so do visitor's books, strangely enough, but that's another thing. But you know, I was interested to see that people were using that as a way to reflect on various aspects of current events, and that their hopes that that's a situation open for improvement.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

These visitors in their follow-up interviews months after their visit valued the participatory approach of the *Power of 1*. They extrapolated to the broader community the benefits of practising participation, engaging with current affairs, being free to share opinions without retribution and the role of individuals in Australian society as observed by P63. These visitors saw the potential role and relevance of museums in the broader community.

Some visitors in their follow-up interviews again expressed their support for participatory experiences by presenting them as an antidote to the shortcomings of traditional museum experiences by providing 'room for reflection' (P1), engaging with children, 'encouraging people to think' (P26) and being able to 'remember more' (P58) (this will be discussed further below):

> P26: I think it's wonderful, it's [participation's] great … I guess it encourages people to think about what it is they're visiting and, I guess, experiencing. If you're involved in that activity, it can often help with remembering it down the track or being more immersed in what it is you're experiencing at the time, I guess, yeah.
> *RC: Do you think it's particularly relevant, given the subject matter of Australia's democracy?*
> P26: Yes, I do, absolutely. Because everyone has such a different journey and view of democracy, and I think it, yeah, it can be quite powerful. I mean, even in the fact that we could write whatever we wanted to on walls, you know, that's a great thing about democracy, you know. Then understanding that aspect, that we can say whatever we want, it's quite powerful actually, *especially for children*.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

> P58: I think it's [participation] definitely a good approach. I mean, I think *I remember more* about that exhibit than many of the others at Old Parliament House, so.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian*

Restating the responses these visitors gave in their exit interviews, a small number of visitors in their follow-up interviews advised taking a cautious approach to introducing participatory experiences into a museum environment:

> P6: Oh, I think it's a very reasonable approach not to take over the whole thing, but I just think people like to just have a little bit of a say or a bit of a fiddle with this or looking closely at some things. I think there's a lot of people interested in certain things, yes.
> *RC: But you wouldn't want to see it take over the whole thing, you said.*
> P6: No … like, I like my TV shows without other people's twitters running across the bottom of it.
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian*

> P48: You can't only benefit from the exhibition through interaction, I think that would put people off. I think if there's a different way of conveying information through the interaction—but simply by visiting, reading, viewing—that you get that information as well, that would be my preference from my generation. But again, as I say, I think it's quite different for the younger generation.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

Again, the follow-up interviewees demonstrated broad support for participatory experiences, and in particular the encouragement of more active participation in broader Australian society. While a small number of visitors made important claims about not overdoing participation and ensuring the accommodation of multiple interests, the potential for participatory experiences to address the shortcomings of traditional museum approaches was supported by visitors and is further discussed in the next section.

7.5.2 Traditional museum experiences

In the context of describing their memories of what they liked about the *Power of 1* participatory experience, interviewees expressed some negative perceptions of traditional museum experiences as passive, didactic, rule-bound and 'not making you think'. These comments echoed multiple comments from visitors in their exit interviews and the interviews with the museum professionals. Several visitors portrayed traditional museums as 'just' passive and static experiences that involved

walking and looking and were unappealing to younger audiences. These visitors suggested that interactive experiences were easier to remember:

> P1: It's just interesting to see a museum evoking not *just memories of the past*, you know, 'let's just go through the nice building and relive its political history', but actually using it to reflect on the present is a useful way of using the institution. And also of harnessing some of the technology that was used in the institution because it can sometimes to be hard to get younger people to contribute to that sort of debate.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P26: Oh, absolutely. We've been fortunate enough to visit many different museums and exhibitions, and I think exhibitions that are interactive often *help them remember more, I guess, rather than just walking around and looking at pictures*. If they're able to interact and read and do things, yeah, it helps them understand the journey, I guess, that Australia's been on or Australia is on.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

> P58: I think it's because you have the opportunity to engage, and also I guess it was different for me, in terms of *rather than just sort of looking at descriptions on walls and plaques* and that sort of thing, there was sort of more to it and something just, yeah, I guess, new about it.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian*

> P76: It's fresh. It's still the ideas and the way it was enjoyable for the girls, there is four years difference between them, and for both ages it was enjoyable and for me as a mum to be there with them and discover things like that. It was enjoyable for everyone. And it stuck, actually. It stuck in our head more than anything.
> *RC: As in stuck more than the other things you were doing when you visited Canberra do you mean?*
> P76: Yeah, yeah. Even at the museum, sorry not the museum, at the exhibition, it was *more interesting than just walking and looking at picture* of this or that … how to explain? Because maybe because each room is different from the other ones and represents different ages or era of time.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

Although participants in the exit and follow-up interviews believed participation helped them remember more from the exhibition, their initial answers (in the first section of this chapter) indicated they had still forgotten both episodic and semantic memories of their visit. Some visitors commented on the potential for participatory exhibitions to remove physical, emotional and intellectual barriers that distance museums from their visitors:

> P63: [Participation is] basically kind of sort of removing that kind of glass wall between the …. between the attendee and the exhibit. I found it quite inspiring because there was a strong element of, you know, inviting people to experience things through touch and through sound, *rather than just by standing back and looking.*
> P63: I mean, if you're just asking people to kind of, you know, walk through a museum and look at things and read plaques and listen to audio, that's quite a narrow experience … you know, you cannot ask a blind person to just walk through a museum and look at the art. So I think participatory experiences are incredibly important in … and not just people who have particular barriers to experiencing, but just because human beings do learn things differently and they do take in information differently. So if you're offering people different ways of engaging with something then you're maximising their chance of taking away something of use from that experience.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

> P74: I think it's good because when you go into a museum, usually you feel a bit, you feel *it's really fragile and you can't touch anything and you keep to yourself*, whereas you have more comfort with interactive activities.
> RC: Why do you think there's more comfort from the interactive activities?
> P74: Because you're allowed to touch, you're allowed to ... there's more freedom to do things. *There's no negative saying, 'No, no, don't do this*, don't do that'.
> *Female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern*

In their follow-up interviews, P63 and P76 provided additional reflections on visitors' perceptions of traditional museum experiences, including that they were inaccessible, exclusive, sensitive, isolating, negative and rule-bound. One visitor (P48) felt that the iPod technology was particularly confronting because she had been taught not to touch things that were not her belongings and this concern was reinforced by the rules of a museum. Traditional museum rules are rarely on display in today's institutions but they are well-known and understood by visitors and reinforce the perception of fragility and isolation as noted above by P74. P48 shared her thoughts regarding how museums could encourage visitors to participate and overcome the cultural barriers within museums that would need to change to introduce a participatory environment:

> P48: I was concerned about it breaking or, you know, those sorts of things. I don't know. If there's, like, 'Please feel free to touch' in big signs that say, you know, 'Do this. We encourage you to do it', rather than just sort of hanging from the roof. You don't know if you're allowed to touch or not allowed to touch. I suppose perhaps being more overtly clear that it is an interactive kind of thing and actively encourage people to use it. It's not going to break. If it does break there's no problem if it breaks. I don't know. I think it's just changing a mindset. I'm not 100% sure what you can do really, apart from, yeah, just encouraging people and indicating to them that there's not going to be sort of adverse consequences if you do interact with it and it does break or it falls from the ceiling or whatever it is.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

In the visitors' and museum professional's minds (see Chapter 5), participatory experiences appeared to present an inclusive and positive alternative. Through this, participatory experiences also represent an abandonment of the very values that have defined traditional museums, built their exclusive audiences and continue to limit their relevance in today's society. It is this binary opposition of traditional versus participatory museum experiences that perhaps explains why some museum staff resists the change to participation and why visitors seek to embrace it, as they explained in their exit and follow-up interviews.

7.5.3 Australian democracy and politics

Visitors participating in the follow-up interviews echoed the frustrations expressed during the exit interviews, including the state of Australian democracy, concerns about the (then) Australian prime minister and his government's policies, feeling voiceless, the undemocratic and unrepresentative nature of current politics and apathy among voters. The most frequently expressed concern was a feeling of voicelessness and of politicians not listening. This was a timely complaint perhaps

prompted by the *Power of 1* exhibition or representative of general dissatisfaction among the community:

> P6: They're there because we voted them in. They're not there for their own, um, to make themselves rich or for anything else. We used to have politicians that didn't always sound quite so nice, but what they said they meant, and they all had a reason for being in parliament and it wasn't just for the pension, you know, that they're going to get now. And I just don't believe they take any notice of us, and I think they only want to give lectures so they only listen to the noisiest people, the ones that make the most fuss they then listen to, you know? I don't think they listen to us little people at all.
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian*

> P26: I think Australian politics is struggling with, I'm not sure what the right word is, they're struggling to define what they want the Australia of the future to be and I think it doesn't come down to a political party to determine that. They need to listen to what Australians are saying and take on board, you know, things that are working well and things that aren't working well. And, you know, use our experiences and views to help shape policies that are going to benefit everyone.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

> P58: Oh, I just mean that, well, I mean if we're thinking about ideas about marriage equality or the environment, there'd be so many different perspectives on that. And so while I'll have feelings one way or another, not everyone will and so when you see, I guess, government taking action in ways that are different to the way that you think and the way you vote and that sort of stuff it sort of, yeah, it makes you feel like you're not necessarily being heard.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian*

> P74: Because sometimes you feel, in such a large country, you feel voiceless, you feel helpless, you can't really change anything. Whereas if on that wall everyone can see, even if they don't know it's you, you're just another voice, you have that … people are still going to read it, they're going to see it … not just going past it.
> *Female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern*

These visitors in their follow-up interviews perceived museum participation as both a way to be heard and a way to address the sense of not being listened to, signalling that the interviewees viewed an expanded and more socially relevant role for museums. The seriousness of not being heard by the government led P76 (an immigrant from Iraq) to suggest that Australia was not a true democracy:

> P76: As for democracy, yeah, um, I don't know. We believe in Australia it is there and in the same way it's not there. When the government wants to do it, they just do it even when there is a demonstration against it. Like the GST. When they want it to happen, it did happen. No matter how much people said no, I don't think. So there is a bit of difference from where we came from [Iraq] where you can say nothing, whereas here you can and sometimes I think—my girls they think no, they think democracy is not that bad—but for me I think when the government wants it, when they want to hear it, they hear it. When they don't want to hear it, they don't care.
> P76: Sometimes we see all politicians where they, they lose their connection with people, no matter how much. I mean, sometimes I feel there are things happening here that is very much the same as we used to have under Saddam [Hussein] regime.
> P76: It's kind of polished here, but to be honest with you it does exist here but it's polished.

> *RC: Polished in what way?*
> P76: It's not a straightforward, non-democratic or straightforward tyrant, but they don't listen. They do what they want, and one example this year was the budget. At the end, Joe Hockey [then federal treasurer], he did what he wanted and he didn't … and when they stop him about this and that, he made this silly comments about poor people don't drive cars or go get a better job or do this. This is losing touch with who you are being.
> P76: Always at the beginning, when they still, when it's election time, all of them give you the best thing you want to hear about the future, what they're going to be doing for us. When they get their minister's chair or the prime minister's chair then it's a totally different thing. And very much it's what used to happen and what is still happening actually in the Middle East, where they get their chair, presidency chair, and they get hold of it and they don't let go, and it's very much to them and their families other than all the people in this country.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

P76 expressed a powerlessness and cynicism with regard to untrustworthy politicians that was also reported in the IGPA analysis of the *Power of 1* national baseline survey (Evans, Halupka and Stoker 2014). P76's distrust of politicians is a result of broken promises, self-interest and elitism. In many ways, these complaints could also be levelled at museums and demonstrate why it is essential that museums avoid token or pseudo-participation (Cornwall 2004) (see Chapter 2) and ensure that visitor participation is genuine and made available with a 'response' mechanism. In the case of the *Power of 1* exhibition, the visitors' contributions should have been shared with government to deliver on MoAD's (2014b) promise: 'you have a voice. It counts. (It always has.) Have your say and be heard'. This would have been a significant step towards making museums democratic.

Inevitably, the sense of voicelessness resulted in division, disengagement and disillusionment among the follow-up interviewees, in particular with the (then Abbott) government:

> P1: It's the other side of how disengaged and how disillusioned people actually are. Many people are disillusioned because, simply because they're apathetic and don't really care, but a lot of people are disillusioned because they do care and they're disengaged because they see the standing, the political debate in Australia has become cretinous.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P6: I think the government likes us to be divided at the moment so they can get away with a lot more things.
> *Female, aged over 65, escort driver, Australian*

As a result of the findings from the exit interview, the follow-up interviewees were asked if they thought that participation was democratic. Most visitors thought it was but there were some highly considered arguments both for and against. Although there was continued enthusiasm for participation in a museum context, the comments were expressed in the context of voicelessness and disengagement and theories of participation in which the risk of 'token' participation is high:

> P1: But democracy is a slippery word, but in the best traditions [it] … opens our input and authority to a wide range of people and interest groups and positions.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

> P76: That's a freedom, yeah, amazing, in a way. It's a freedom and it gives confidence and encouragement, yeah.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

> P74: Yeah because you can choose to participate or not. You don't have to participate.
> *Female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern*

> P58: I think there's sort of a need that if you want to have a voice and be able to participate, to engage in a society or engage in something then, yeah, they need to be an active participant in that.
> *Male, aged 25–34, student, Australian*

One visitor agreed that participation was democratic, but noted that the narrow and exclusive audience visiting museums signified that participation in museums was at risk of being undemocratic:

> P63: Yes, absolutely. Yeah, I mean, it means that you are enabling a wider range of people to participate in an experience that—that event or that activity or that exhibition, and that's—I mean, you know, I guess the kind of underpinning premise of democracy is that people participate in that process. But only opening it up to a very small sector of society [that visits museums] would not be very democratic.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

Additionally, two interviewees did not think participation was democratic, providing thoughtful and deep engagement with the principles of democracy, power and access. These comments should be considered in decisions about expanding participation opportunities in museums and assessing the sincerity of long-made claims to 'democratise the museum':

> P48: (Laughs.) No, to be honest, I don't [think participation is democratic]. But there's a long answer to that, and I don't know if this is the forum for it. People need to have the power to participate and I don't think everybody has the power to participate. It's very much depends on your socio-economic level, your political persuasion … it's not something that's just superficial to say 'these people can participate', but I think there are so many things which have to be taken into consideration so that people can properly participate in something. So no, I don't think people do have an equal playing field when it comes to participation.
> *Female, aged 45–54, lawyer, South African*

> P119: Oh, you know, I've thought about democracy and, you know, I mean on the surface of things, it's quite this utopian idea that everyone gets a say and that you have some way of influencing or adding to or determining decision-making. But there's always … democracy, I reckon now, after having thought about it quite deeply, always has, it always occurs at the expense of something, and it has started that ... it started that way, you know? Women couldn't have a say in Ancient Greece, slaves couldn't have a say. That's quite explicit today. You have to be over 18 to have a say, and you have to be able to fill out the forms properly to have a say. You have to find out the ways of translating your opinions into a 'yes' or 'no', or reducing them to a 'yes' or 'no' to have a say. If you agree partially with someone and partially with someone else, you have to make a decision between the two. So yes, participatory, but really controlled participation, and I think the mechanisms that determine those controls aren't democratic because they're out of our hands completely. And I don't think you can have one without the other. So yes, [it's] participatory, but in a very controlled way. So in that sense I don't think, well, it is democratic.

Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal

Based on these visitors' responses in their follow-up interviews months after their visit, a new conceptualisation of museum participation needs to be developed that builds on the experiences of political participation but avoids its exclusion, privilege, structure and control. Within the field of political science Stoker (2006) argues that the interests of citizens who will be affected by a decision should be known, and that citizens may need to receive support to develop the skills they need to participate. With this in mind, future museum participation must provide opportunities to participate or not participate and multiple, unstructured and supported options to be involved. It must also be uncensored, responsive and relevant. Fundamentally, museums cannot democratise until their audiences are expanded. It is essential that museums diversify their audiences, and support them to participate. Museums must be more inclusive and representative of the communities they serve.

7.5.4 Museums as sites for renewal

If museums are able to embrace the activity and spirit of participation that addresses the failures of traditional museum experiences then there is real potential for museums to become sites for democratic renewal and community engagement, as proposed by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) and others (Sandell 1998, 2002; Janes and Conaty 2005; Anderson 2012; Fleming 2013, 2014). Participation makes space for two-way dialogue and shares power with visitors who are respected, connected and free and equal partners. Participation encourages listening to and responding to visitor feedback and welcomes citizens' views and their active, thought-provoking and unstructured responses. Visitors valued MoAD's *Power of 1* exhibition as a realistic response to the community's disengagement and powerlessness with regard to the current state of Australian politics. Although caution was urged in terms of not overusing participation or abandoning all traditional museum approaches, there was a broad and genuine level of support for museums to play a role in facilitating democratic dialogue and be a forum thorough which the voices of the people could find their way to the parliament:

> P1: Museums aren't traditionally something that is used in that way, but there's no reason to my mind why they shouldn't be because to make them modern, relevant institutions, they need to think about how they might be a sounding board for ideas. Rather than … many people like them [museums] to be *just something set in stone*, about how things used to be, and an authoritative view about it. So, especially for a museum of democracy, which allows … its remit should allow us to be outside of those more traditional ways of doing things and grab on to the new technology and ideas. And where it should be going, it's a little bit hard to say because museums don't traditionally tell decision-makers what people think … I see no reason why a museum of democracy, which is something new, shouldn't be actually feeding back into decision-makers' thoughts.
> *Male, aged 55–64, professor, Anglo*

The follow-up interviews were an opportunity to gain further information from visitors about their interest in forwarding visitor comments from the *Power of 1* exhibition to politicians. Visitors had sound suggestions about how politicians could access visitor contributions and therefore expand MoAD's role to be a site for democratic renewal and engagement:

> *RC: And if it was up to you, how would we get the visitor messages up to parliament?*
> P26: I think we could write on cards, couldn't we? And there was the walls, I guess someone could transcribe what was written on the walls? Or I'd ask the politicians to walk through, you know, to sort of go on the journey themselves of the history of Australian democracy and then at the end read comments that are around their thoughts. That would be quite powerful.
> *Female, aged 35–44, engineer, Italian/Burmese*

> P63: I would … I would be maybe inviting our elected representatives to come and look at the responses and see the kind of things that people are raising. I mean, I understand that, you know, well, you know, it's part of their jobs to have an understanding of what the issues are in the community, but in an exhibition where you're inviting people's responses and thoughts on the state of our democracy currently, would seem to be quite a kind of a powerful focus tool for giving messages to our elected representatives about, you know, the community's expectations of them and where they think they should be focusing their attention, yeah.
> *RC: And so do you think politicians are listening? Do you think they need a forum like this to hear from the citizens?*
> P63: I think they're listening to a degree, but I also think they have many voices to listen to. So they have the voices of the community. They also obviously have the voices of various industry and, you know, they have a lot of voices to listen to. I think that … and I don't see why an exhibition like this could not just be kind of, you know, one more tool, one more, you know, way of helping them focus on the issues that the Australian community wants them to focus on.
> *Female, aged 35–44, public servant, Anglo*

Museums have been described as town squares and as safe places for dangerous ideas (Gurian 1995). Within the context of democratic engagement, museums can become places for people to connect with their community, especially if they have no other way to make those connections in their regular lives. Museums can become spaces to exchange points of views in safe and potentially constructive ways as the following visitor comments from the follow-up interviews suggest:

> P74: I remember reading about the government should not … the budget cuts should not cut anything from education, and I think that actually didn't happen, so that was, like, good. I think I remember seeing stuff about boat people as well, some people opposed, some people said stop, to close down the detention centres.
> *RC: And how did that make you feel?*
> P74: Well, it made me feel, to the opinions that aligned with mine, it made me feel a sense of community. That it's not just me thinking that way, it's a lot of other people. And to the ones that were opposing them, I was actually happy that it wasn't the majority of what was written.
> *Female, aged 16, student (household occupation driver), Middle Eastern*

> P119: We had a great laugh and had a good time. It was able to, you know, there was space for us to talk about things, political things in a different way that's not being angry or pissed off or fed up.
> *Female, aged 35–44, policy advisor, Australian Aboriginal*

> P76: And we discussed what people were writing about, we agreed with some, we disagreed with others.
> *RC: So when you were reading the other responses, how did it make you feel when some of them you agreed with and some of them you didn't agree with?*
> P76: To be honest, [I felt] happy because there was some stuff there—I can't remember exactly, about immigration, education, about taxes, these sorts of things—I was happy because, I guess, I don't know much original, like, Aussies, here. We are a very small family, and I don't get to discuss such things with some educated people who are original Australians. So when I read these things I know they are true … I'm not a very social person. I don't know how to start the conversation. So for me, I don't know if you'd call it, I am an introvert?
> *RC: Yes, introverted.*
> P76: So this is how I can get others' opinions.
> *Female, aged 35–44, driver, Middle Eastern*

These museum visitors in their follow-up interviews envisioned a more ambitious and democratic future for MoAD than did some museum professionals: as a site to debate politics, an opportunity to engage in real and imagined conversations with decision-makers, or for P76, a space to feel 'happy' because as an introvert with few social contacts, she realised she shared views about important issues with others in the community who she otherwise cannot meet. After a century of museums and scholars talking to themselves about the need to democratise, it appears that the way to democratise museums is to listen to the people, the citizenry—museum visitors—to give them a voice and to share museums' power with the people they are funded to serve. The adoption in museums of a participatory culture and democratic practice—in which the museum becomes a participant to share power in mutually beneficial ways and a platform for the voices, expertise and concerns of citizens—has the potential to make museums democratic, agents for social change and sites for democratic renewal and community engagement, both within institutional walls and within society. Participation may be able to bring about cultural and social change within the sector, to be more socially inclusive for a greater diversity of audiences and voices, and increase museums' relevance.

7.6 Conclusion

This case study undertook longitudinal research using follow-up interviews with museum visitors to delve deeper into the ideas, concepts and themes raised during the exit surveys and identify the memories of visitors to better understand the meanings that visitors made and what was important to them during a visit to a museum exhibition. Although the categorisation of episodic and semantic memories was inadequate to accommodate for the deep emotional engagement of a participatory exhibition which did not rely on the learning paradigm, the exploration of conversations proved particularly valuable. These conversations confirmed a key finding of the *Power of 1* case study. Participatory experiences forged personal connections with the exhibition content by not only sparking conversations within groups of visitors or between visitors and museum staff, but 'imagined conversations' with future and past visitors, potential decision-makers

and power holders and with communities to whom visitors may not otherwise have access. This demonstrates the potential value of participatory exhibitions to provoke and expand conversations, both real and imagined, that can help to shape and recall memories of museum experiences and provide democratic, imagined conversation between society, individuals and the museum. This demonstrates both the value and potential of participation to the museum sector, and the potential for museums to be sites for democratic renewal and community engagement providing some conditions are met. First, museums must be open to establishing a participatory model that is genuine, not token, and use this to act as a role model for how participation should be undertaken in civic life. Citizens are all too aware of not being listened to by politicians and this is contributing to the broader disengagement from politics and cynicism about participation and democracy. Second, museums must break the traditional practices and cultural norms that distance and devalue them from their visitors. Museums must seek to share their power, provide multiple points of entry and sensory engagement and welcome and connect diverse voices into their experiences. Based on the views of many visitors (and some museum professionals) in this study, 'just' looking, reading and walking are no longer enough. Third, as a result of changing museum practice and culture, museums must fight to broaden their audience and break down their exclusionary and elite status that acts as a barrier to many potential visitors who have a right to participate in museums. Fourth (and this condition is the reason why there is a need to change the narrow and privileged profile of museum visitors), as taxpayer-funded institutions, museums have a responsibility and the opportunity (with their vast resources, significant collections and reputation for truth and authority) to empower people to have their say and participate more deeply in democracy and current affairs, connect members of communities who otherwise may not meet, and, potentially, to respect the democratic traditions and experiences that citizens and politicians have a duty to uphold, renew and strengthen.

C

MEANING

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

Imagined conversations, real social change: the power of museum participation

8.1 Introduction

In the context of evolving debate about the new museology, social inclusion and evidence of multiple failed attempts to democratise museum practice (see Chapter 2), the *Power of 1* case study sought to examine how participation could address the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and democratise museums to become relevant, responsible, diverse and multi-vocal platforms for the wider social good. Can a participatory culture—the process, product and spirit—make museums democratic and agents for social change within both institutional walls and society? Can museums become sites and champions for democratic renewal and community engagement? When visitors to the *Power of 1* engaged in 'imagined conversations' with future and past visitors, decision-makers and power holders and with communities to whom they may not otherwise have access, they uncovered the powerful (and power-shifting) potential of museum participation. Participation sparked conversations, generated memories and activated visitor agency. By requiring a personal and immediate response, participation forged a connection with the lived experiences of visitors to help them make meanings. Museum visitors could imagine a more ambitious and expansive role for MoAD than could museum professionals. The museum became a platform or conduit to connect the voices, expertise and concerns of citizens to new communities, both real and imagined, make meaning, activate visitor agency, accommodate multiple perspectives and build communities. The *Power of 1* case study demonstrated how participation became a democratic, imagined conversation between society, individuals and the museum.

However, this case study of participation also produced meaningful—if uncomfortable—results about contemporary museum practice, illustrating why many previous attempts to democratise the sector have failed. In many ways, the museum sector remains inherently and actively undemocratic. For instance, internal museum staff relied on personal and untested opinions to evaluate and occasionally undermine proposed visitor experiences and approaches, including participation. The use of rhetoric and false compliments by some internal staff (M8) and language that could close debate, such as 'safe' and 'authentic' (M9), could be used as tools to resist change and ultimately

inhibit the museum sector's ability to democratise (Sandell 2002a; Ross 2004; Spock 2009; Fleming 2013). These contemporary controlling practices uphold centuries of practices, policies and products in public museums, in which museum access has been controlled by the elite who constrain visitor behaviour and actively resist attempts to change their practice (Bennett 1995; Halpin 1997). However, there is hope. Some internal museum staff (M7 and M9) demonstrated an ability and openness to change their practice even though it felt to them at times uncomfortable, uncertain and frustrating. The comfortable, open-ended collaboration with external museum professionals who were committed to approaching the project from the visitor perspective was, to an extent, a successful strategy by the museum director (M5) to influence internal culture and deliver an unconventional museum experience.

From the visitors' perspective (as well as some museum professionals'), participation presented a compelling and democratic alternative to traditional museum experiences: active versus passive, conversation versus didactic and multiple versus singular voices. Participatory experiences represent an abandonment of some of the values that have defined traditional museums, built their exclusive audiences and continue to limit their relevance in today's society. It is this binary opposition of traditional versus participatory museum experiences that may explain why there is resistance among some museum staff to move to a participatory culture and why many visitors embrace it. Indeed, the discomfort and fear expressed by internal museum staff towards participation were contradicted by the actual experiences, needs, responses, abilities and meaning-making of visitors. However, for the museum sector to realise the potential of participation, a more expansive conceptualisation of museum participation needs to be developed. It must provide opportunities to participate or not participate, multiple, unstructured and supported options to be involved and it must be uncensored, responsive and relevant to a diverse and inclusive audience. Key findings from the *Power of 1* case study will now be more fully considered and presented to demonstrate how participation exposed undemocratic museum practices and the multiple ways that participation was meaningful for visitors. These themes will be examined alongside the identification of the barriers and opportunities that will need to be addressed to support the introduction of a participatory culture and help museums become agents for change and social justice.

8.2 Participation exposes undemocratic museum practices

Democratisation of the museum sector is long overdue. Previous and failed attempts to democratise museums were founded on and assessed according to the values of museum institutional cultures. Indeed, the intended meaning of the move to 'democratise' is often unclear, perhaps purposely so, and certainly represents a rhetoric that allows museum professionals to be viewed as doing something towards becoming less elitist. The literature review (see Chapter 2) examined how museum practitioners have been reluctant to surrender control, share power and

embrace change that could diminish their authority (Pierson-Jones 1992; Ross 2004; Spock 2009; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Simon 2010; Takahisa 2011; Kidd 2014). This case study presented multiple and uncomfortable examples of how museum practice remains, in many ways, inherently and actively undemocratic, such as the culture of censorship and control, using prescriptive discourses to dominate and maintain the status quo, sensitivity to (and reticence to consider) professional criticism about the museum sector's role and practice and a disinclination to respectfully connect with the broader community who pay for museums so museums can become more responsible corporate citizens.

8.2.1 The risk of censorship

Most of the risks mentioned by museum professionals and specifically museum staff (see Chapter 5) did not eventuate. There were no empty displays, visitors were able to understand and make meaning from the unconventional display approach (even though most visitors had no previous experience of participatory exhibitions) and there was no damage to the heritage building. However, some risks that were identified by museum professionals did eventuate, including inadequate staffing (to meet the acknowledged extra demands of maintaining participatory exhibitions) and digital technology failure. As there were a large number of visitors who chose to leave a comment or message, the museum did, in fact, lose control of the content in the sense that it was no longer exclusively written by museum staff. The majority of visitors embraced the opportunity to have their say about a range of issues that were important to them, including refugees, education, health, political leadership and accountability, animal rights and the environment. Some visitors made jokes, wrote their name or the name of their football team or hometown, pulled faces, made selfies and used any number of ways to leave their mark.

Although almost all visitors' comments and contributions were within the terms of use guidelines developed by MoAD—that is, they were not 'racist, sexist, homophobic, obscene, or threatening' (MoAD 2014a)—museum staff removed numerous so-called 'junk' messages that were of no value or 'messy' to tidy the space and make room for so-called 'authentic contributions' (M9) (MoAD 2015a). Thus, the contributions from visitors were allowed to stay in the museum only under certain conditions. According to the staff members who maintained the space and moderated the comments, visitor messages needed to be neat, serious and on curatorial message: the organic and authentic sense of the visitors' meaning-making was curtailed. If heritage is about making meaning—constructing and negotiating meaning (Dicks 2000; Smith 2006; S. Macdonald 2013)—then the museum staff were attempting to control the public face of the meaning being curated. Of course, the museum staff could not actually control the meanings being made by visitors, only the public face of it. However, in this way, museum staff were endorsing a particular message and attempting to erase those contributions that made them uncomfortable. Staff was not prepared to

lose control of the content. Rather than democratise, the museum continued to set the rules, constrain options, influence people's desires and preferences and shape agendas in an effort to dominate the museum experience.

8.2.2 Underestimating visitors

This case study found an additional dimension of museum practice that needs to change. Museums need to respect and be better informed about their audiences and stop underestimating visitors. As Anderson (2012, 224) argued, museums must accept 'the population as a whole is as wise, clever and culturally experienced as museum professionals' and museums must refocus 'from what we want to offer, towards what is needed for individual and community well-being'. When I read the contributions from visitors, I felt gratitude and inspiration for the informed, honest, meaningful, surprising, entertaining, authoritative, creative, humorous and challenging comments. The irritating, frustrating, inconsequential and flippant contributions were also encouraging to me because they demonstrated that visitors felt that the museum was a space for them to make their voices heard if they so chose. As McLean (2007, 11) argued, this 'articulated beautifully the powerful human urge to claim a conscious and acknowledged place in this world'. However, what I found surprising was that some of the internal museum staff did not take away this same impression of the visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition. This illustrates the 'disjunction' (Lavine 1992, 139) between the assumptions made by museum staff about visitors and the meanings that visitors actually make in museum exhibitions. This finding further reinforces previous calls for more theoretical grounding about museum visitors, supported by qualitative, longitudinal and interdisciplinary research and greater acceptance and implementation of the findings of that research (S. Macdonald 2005; Sandell 2007; Anderson 2012; Smith 2015).

Interviews with internal museum staff showed a reliance on personal judgements and anecdotal evidence to understand how visitors made meaning from or experienced museum exhibitions. The external collaborators, when they could not provide an answer as to how visitors might experience the exhibition, acknowledged that they would like to know that information. However, some museum staff made bold and definitive statements about how visitors might or might not experience the exhibition or stated how they personally would experience the exhibition, which largely did not correlate with the meanings, messages and activities of the visitors interviewed for this case study. This has been addressed in Chapter 5, but a good example that requires restating was internal staff member M8, who claimed that visitors had not been allowed to express themselves in the way they wanted, young people needed more context, the exhibition was designed for adults (not children or young people), only people like her (i.e., an educated, Anglo-Celtic and middle-class professional) would be able to engage and 'there isn't enough meat there'. None of these statements were supported by the experiences of most of the visitors who were interviewed.

While it is acknowledged that both the initial and follow-up interviews consisted of modest sample sizes of 140 and 11 visitors, respectively, there is still a compelling body of evidence to contradict M8's claims. The majority of visitors expressed themselves by leaving a message, and they valued this opportunity. Many young people deeply engaged with the content and messages of the exhibition and actively contributed to the opportunities to participate; indeed, visitors aged under 17 years were the most likely to leave a message and were most likely to participate in more than one interactive. The balance of museum and visitor content was viewed by most visitors as a strength of the experience, and the strong representation of ordinary peoples' views and the easy and relaxed (less rule-laden) approach was a welcome and refreshing change for visitors to MoAD.

In political science, Stoker (2006) argued that democratic decision-making requires that the interests of citizens be known and democracy requires that people who are affected by a decision should have a say in that decision. However, museum professionals remain undemocratic because they are yet to fully acknowledge that museum visitors are equal and respected partners in the experience and are more active in meaning-making than they are given credit (Pekarik and Schreiber 2012; Smith 2015). Further, the museum sector is reluctant to conduct or implement findings from visitor research to inform and improve its practice. As demonstrated in participatory research from the development studies and political science fields (Hickey and Mohan 2004; Stoker 2006; see also Simon 2010; Carpentier 2011b; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011; Fleming 2013), greater participation from the public will help to achieve lasting and improved outcomes that are supported and understood by communities. In the absence of museum sector support for visitor research, an increased knowledge of and engagement with museum visitors through participation will improve the sector's practice and enable public museums to be more informed about and accountable to the people who pay for their existence—the taxpayers, public and visitors (Stein 2012).

8.2.3 Discourses maintain the status quo

Over several decades, researchers have identified that museum staff resists change—specifically, the shift to a visitor-centred culture—in ways that are 'not always publicly voiced' (Sandell 2003, 45). Interviews with internal museum staff for the *Power of 1* case study showed the need for more open, honest, rigorous and research-based arguments for or against new concepts and approaches, such as participation, to avoid and reject discourses used by professionals to retain the status quo. It should be acknowledged that professionals use a range of polite but potentially destructive strategies that ultimately inhibit the museum sectors' ability to better meet the needs of its visitors and encourage the development of a wider, more diverse and representative museum audience. These include rhetoric, platitudes, false compliments and value-laden language such as safe and authentic designed to (albeit very civilly) shut down debate and resist or undermine change (Fouseki 2010, 187; Fleming 2012). I do not oppose criticism of the exhibition: this project was experimental

and high-risk in nature; therefore, it was explicitly designed as an opportunity to learn from and improve the museum sector's practice. This is why I am now using it as a PhD case study and, as part of this, identifying where my own personal practice failed and could be improved. However, I am concerned when discourses or codes continue to be used to maintain control and ascribe superior value to traditional museum practice as a means to undermine opposition from new and unconventional ways to share power, such as participation.

This case study helped to expose and give form to the 'space … between what museums say they do and what they do without saying' (Duncan 2005, 4), and supported similar findings by S. Macdonald (2002a) about the ways museum professionals underestimate and seek to retain control of visitors. It also provided an illustration of the problems that arise when museum practitioners avoid conflict (Lynch and Alberti 2010, 20; Wilson 2011), shape agendas and seek consensus in undemocratic and potentially harmful ways. In the museum professionals' interviews, the project's external partners were much more comfortable with innovation and uncertainty than were museum staff. To achieve cultural change, some museum staff would benefit from training in how to truly, honestly and at times uncomfortably collaborate with diverse and conflicting partners and ideas as a means to find mutually respectful ways to share power, provide creative platforms for multiple voices and democratise the museum experience. This view supports Fouseki's (2010, 189) recommendation made in relation to community consultation that negotiation training should be provided to museum staff because '[a]cknowledging the contested nature of heritage and the fact that conflict can be a constructive process can be a way forward to develop equitable and sustainable partnerships with communities'. Museum staff could also learn lessons from the external collaborators on the *Power of 1*, who agreed that the unconventional participatory development process was sometimes frustrating, uncertain, disjointed and difficult. Even during problems or minor conflict, however, the honest and open communication style between the external collaborators and the museum and the shared commitment to the agreed creative, ambitious, experimental and democratic outcomes helped the project to achieve its goals.

The external collaborators coped with periods of discomfort because the project was developed in an environment of trust and respect. As Smith and Fouseki (2011, 100) argued, 'contestation and dissent are an integral part to the consultation process … because any collaborative project or consultation practice is ultimately about the negotiation of the distribution of resources of power'. While the renegotiation of power relations is unlikely to take place without tension and contestation, it can be done respectfully and honestly as was demonstrated by the external collaboration process for the *Power of 1* exhibition. The defensiveness that museum professionals feel when they are criticised (Witcomb 2003, 167) either in visitor research or during consultation processes, for example, is another aspect of museum practice that needs to change. Instead of becoming distressed with conflict and contestation during change and the renegotiation of power

relationships with audiences and communities, museum professionals need to reflect on the duplicity and dishonesty of saying one thing but doing another (Duncan 2005). Museum professionals should be supported to develop resilience, and much like Adam's (1939, 20) comment about democracy, museums need to be irritated, challenged and amused. The reverence towards museum objects that has extended to reverence towards museum staff and culture is not a healthy aspect of museum practice. This attitude is limiting the sector's ability to bring in new voices, meanings and approaches to museums and therefore helps to explain why there have been multiple failed attempts to democratise museum practice.

8.3 Participation is meaningful for visitors

For visitors to the *Power of 1*, participation was a powerful opportunity to forge personal connections with the content and participate in conversations with real and imagined communities within the museum and beyond. Visitors could see a more ambitious and expansive role for the museum when they articulated the strong desire for their contributions to be forwarded to decision-makers beyond the museum. Without prompting, visitors used the interviews to express negative perceptions about traditional museum experiences, such as passive, didactic, rule-bound, lacking stimulation and unable to cater for different age groups and interests. Despite the, at times, poor exhibition maintenance, visitors enjoyed the participatory experiences in the *Power of 1* because they were easy to understand and accessible and demonstrated that visitors were respected, connected and free and equal partners in the museum experience. The actual experiences of visitors (see Chapters 6 and 7) contradicted many of the predictions of some of the internal staff members (see Chapter 5). It also illustrated the potential, significant benefits for the museum sector when change and a participatory culture is embraced, visitors are respected and the museum sector accepts and responds to its obligations as socially responsible institutions.

8.3.1 Real and imagined conversations

A key finding of the *Power of 1* case study was that participatory experiences forge personal connections with exhibition content by not only sparking conversations within groups of visitors or between visitors and museum staff, but 'imagined conversations' with future and past visitors, potential decision-makers and power holders and with communities to whom visitors may not otherwise have access. For instance, during the exit interviews at MoAD, visitors commented on the conversations they had in relation to other visitors' contributions:

> P107: I guess it's the point of the exhibition as well: 'the power of one voice'. Anything centred around that, particularly about inclusiveness. For instance, people would write, 'I'm Australian', then people would write after that a comma and 'because I'm Asian' and then a comma 'because I'm Indigenous' and then comma.

> P107: There are a few of those around as well and I thought that they were quite interesting … the add-on effects. And that is the point of democracy as well so that resonates with me.
> *Male, aged 25–34, doctor, Caucasian*

The *Power of 1* follow-up interviews supported in multiple and sometimes interesting ways the findings from previous longitudinal studies (Falk and Storksdieck 2005) that conversations were helpful in generating memories of museum experiences because they forged social and personal relevance. Participatory experiences have the power to provoke discussion and the reflection of content and ideas by requiring an immediate and personal response to the exhibition that could be later remembered. The follow-up interviewees indicated that in addition to talking with friends and family, they participated in conversations with imagined audiences. This involved the act of leaving a comment or contribution in a public exhibition, which created a conversation or a way to communicate with people they did not know but who, in their minds, were politicians (dead or alive) or other unknown visitors. As P76 stated in her follow-up interview, she was happy to read visitors' comments about immigration, education and taxes because as a self-described, introverted Middle Eastern immigrant woman from a small family, she did not know many 'educated people, who are original Aussies'. So, she said, 'When I read these things, I know they are true … and this is how I can get others' opinions' (P76/F6). P76 was grateful for the opportunity to view what she perceived as the 'true' views held by 'original Aussies' with whom she did not usually have an opportunity to speak with or share ideas or concerns. This demonstrates that a potential value of participatory exhibitions is to provoke and expand conversations, both real and imagined, that can help to shape and recall memories of museum experiences. Redolent of Anderson's (2006, 6) imagined communities, but not necessarily limited by nationalism, visitors to the *Power of 1* likely never met one another but felt connected by shared views, frustrations, memories, identities or sense of humour. This substantial finding forges a role for museums to connect citizens who may be isolated from or even unknown to communities to whom they should feel supported and connected. In this way, participation becomes a democratic, imagined conversation between society, individuals and the museum and demonstrates both the value and potential of participation to the museum sector and broader society.

8.3.2 Rethinking traditional museum experiences

One of the strongest and most surprising messages communicated by the visitors during both exit and follow-up interviews (see Chapters 6 and 7) and from some museum professionals (including staff) (see Chapter 5) was that traditional museum experiences were perceived as inadequate because they are passive, didactic (one-way), rule-laden, distant and boring. A recurring statement was that visitors preferred the participatory experiences over traditional experiences because the act of participating, such as leaving a comment or reading another visitor's comment, 'made you think'

(P5L, P4L and P48). Similar statements that the *Power of 1* exhibition made visitors think were articulated in different questions throughout exit and follow-up interviews. Similarly, when many interviewees described traditional museum experiences, they used the word 'just' to precede the description. For instance, P5L stated, 'It actually makes you think about what you're doing rather than just walking past and reading or not reading as the case may be. It helps to engage'. Further, P29 said, 'I think maybe you definitely think more about it when you can do something, rather than just going around and seeing, looking, you know?'

One of the most frequently used phrases in describing museum experiences was that visitors preferred the participatory exhibition over traditional museum experiences because participation 'made you think'. This is most surprising given that museums are typically considered (and vigorously defend themselves as) scholarly and authoritative institutions that value their educational remit and pride themselves on objectivity and rigour (Wilson 2011, 132–33). In this context, it is notable that visitors said that the experience of participation made them 'think', not learn, and that 'education' was only the fourth most frequent (16.4%) reason for the museum visit that was given by visitors to the *Power of 1*. This supports the work of several scholars (S. Macdonald 2002a; Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; Smith 2015) who suggested that education is not the only reason why people visit museums. These comments justify the approach to this case study from the visitor perspective, rather than a learning perspective. Further research into visitors' perceptions of traditional museum experiences is needed to better understand the relationship between 'thinking'—in the way that visitors want to be stimulated during their visit—and participatory experiences.

Several visitors and museum professionals strongly felt that the participatory approach that was used in the *Power of 1* respected visitor agency more than did traditional museum experiences, which are perceived to be didactic and one-way. P16 said, 'We strongly believe that we are all capable, competent people who have voices and do need to be heard and not just to be talked to'. 'Or told', added her partner (P13). External collaborator M3 noted that exhibitions tended towards 'broadcasting, you know, the communication is all one-way' and another external partner observed that some museums' attitudes towards engaging new audiences were uninformed and tended to oversimplify (M4). Other visitors felt that the participatory approach was more inclusive because it provided opportunities to engage with all the senses, not only sight. This was perceived by visitors as a way to make museum experiences accessible to a more diverse and inclusive audience, in particular younger visitors and people with a disability (P63). These visitors' comments suggest that museums are not perceived as spaces that currently welcome and accommodate the needs of people with disabilities or young people and visitors are aware that museums are not accessible to all audiences.

The fetishisation of the object by museum professionals (S. Macdonald 2002b, 2013) and the widespread use of text panels and object labels should also be interrogated. This is in light of visitors' comments, such as, 'Rather than a dry artefact … you've got this [participatory exhibition], which is good. It's interactive … it's a question and it's an answer' (P12), and, 'You pay more attention to what you're doing. Instead of just, like, reading a slab on the wall that says what a painting means … you get to actually read what to do, do it, then take it all in while you're doing it, and while you do it you remember it all' (P100). These comments reflect research by Kidd (2014, 37), who suggested that visitors 'fetishise' museum experiences as 'dry, dusty, stiff and impenetrable', but then Kidd also asserted that museums are actually 'immersive and full of play'. Kidd would likely disagree with *Power of 1* visitors' perceptions of traditional museum experiences as rule-bound, passive and one-way, echoing Worts' (2007) frustration about the 'museum shuffle' in contemporary museums. The reverence that accompanies this fetishisation is created and upheld by museum rules, in particular, 'Don't touch'. Several visitors in their exit and follow-up interviews preferred the open and participatory approach. One visitor noted that it felt like a 'glass wall' had been removed 'between the attendee and the exhibit' (P63/F2). It appears that these rules and the typical ways of interacting in a museum stifle conversation and make people uncomfortable 'because when you go into a museum, usually you feel a bit, you feel it's really fragile and you can't touch anything and you keep to yourself, whereas you have more comfort with interactive activities … because you're allowed to touch … there's more freedom to do things. There's no negative saying, "No, no, don't do this, don't do that"' (P74/F8). This last comment suggests that the rules, culture and negativity of museums make them undemocratic because visitors cannot experience museums on their own terms. These same museum rules made a small number of visitors to the *Power of 1* unsure about whether they were allowed to sit down in the exhibition's chair, touch the participatory activity in the Builders Room, use the iPods in the Gen Y Room or write on the wall in the Tally Room. Although most visitors understood how to participate in the exhibition, as was demonstrated by the large volume of visitors' contributions and the majority of visitors leaving a contribution or casting a vote, the case study shows that visitors may require some support from staff or other means to accept museums' transition from a controlled to a more participatory experience. This supports political scientist Stoker's (2006) contention that citizens should participate in decisions which affect their lives and may need support to be able to do so.

Further, many of the museum professionals who were interviewed, including internal staff, external contractors and the museum director, perceived traditional museum approaches as pedagogical, 'objects and labels', not 'open' and didactic (rather than engaging the visitor in conversation). These museum professionals said that traditional museum experiences were less able to generate relevant research than an academic partner and not able to value visitor agency and expertise.

The claims that traditional museum experiences are passive, do not make people think and are not respectful of visitor agency indicate that museums must reconsider the traditional practices and cultural norms that are not valued by people who attend museums and distance them from their visitors. This could also indicate why so many people outside of the traditional and privileged visitor profile do not attend museums. Museums must seek to share their power, provide multiple points of entry and present, welcome and connect into their experiences diverse voices and audiences. Participation is perceived by visitors as a way to address these shortcomings. Based on the views of many visitors in this study, 'just' looking, reading and walking is no longer enough.

8.3.3 Museum staff predictions are contradicted by visitors

In contrast to the concern expressed by internal museum staff member (M8) that the *Power of 1* needed a stronger curatorial context through which visitors could make sense of and meaning from the exhibition, visitors demonstrated deep engagement with the meaning, messages, activities and content of the exhibition. Indeed, visitors responded positively to both the *Power of 1*'s historical and research exhibition content and to other visitors' contributions. Visitors accepted the invitation to participate and activate visitor agency, and through this made connections to their own lived experiences of democracy. In the exit and follow-up interviews, visitors showed a deep engagement with the participatory elements of the *Power of 1* exhibition in terms of the opportunity to have their say and read and review other visitors' comments. This demonstrates the disjunction between museum professionals' views of how visitors respond with how they actually respond (Lavine 1992). Cautions by museum staff during interviews and in the museum studies literature (S. Macdonald 2005; McLean and Pollock 2007) about a potential loss of authority did not eventuate. In fact, the majority of visitors took messages from the exhibition that related to the intended themes and aims as defined by the organisers. Compared with non-participatory exhibitions (Smith 2015, 2016b, 2017; also Smith personal communication 2017), visitors to the *Power of 1* participatory exhibition demonstrated higher engagement and were less likely to give 'no message' responses. Participatory exhibitions also appear more likely to inspire visitors to change their behaviour. This suggests that participatory exhibitions that rely and draw upon the personal experiences of visitors help visitors to engage with content, take messages away and make meaning.

These findings contradict Witcomb (2006), who warned of the risk of too great a dependence on 'dialogic interactivity' (which has many parallels with the principles and intent of participation). Witcomb argued that if visitors are allowed to take on too much responsibility for making their own meaning, this would result in the 'emptying out of meaning' and 'loss of community' (Witcomb 2006, 359). The *Power of 1* case study demonstrated that participation did not create an 'unsafe' place for visitors as was cautioned by one internal staff member (M8). In fact, it was quite the opposite: the opportunity to read or contribute comments to the exhibition helped the

interviewees to relate the content of the exhibition to their personal experiences. It was not a distant or abstract message, but one that resonated with the lived experiences of MoAD's visitors, and for the *Power of 1* exhibition resulted in a much higher than typical level of engagement, synthesis and meaning-making.

8.3.4 The promise of participation

Advocates for participation promise significant transformation for the museum sector by encouraging active, engaged and connected citizens through activating visitor agency, encouraging museum professionals to share power and transforming museums as a platform for social good at both the time of the visit and beyond the walls of the museum (see Chapter 2). Perhaps the best known advocate for participation, Simon (2010, 351), proposed that participation encouraged meaningful community dialogue and 'valuable civic and learning experiences'.

Visitors to the *Power of 1* tended to support the claims to activate visitor agency. The experience of being able to participate, leave a comment and have a say in a museum space was positive for visitors and many felt powerful and valued the opportunity to have their say. As P26 stated, 'I actually found it quite powerful, writing in big letters on a wall. I wrote something about equality and being a democracy and that it's so important. Just writing it in big letters was just so empowering that someone would walk in and see that message that I'd written'. Young people also valued the experience to have their say, including an 11-year-old boy who said, 'I just felt good because instead of needing to be 18 above [to vote], I got a chance to choose what I want' (P116).

Visitors were also encouraged to be engaged and connected citizens. From the exhibition's themes and the semantic memories shared by visitors who participated in follow-up interviews months after their visit, visitors made connections to their own lives, thought about the past in the present and indicated that they would change their behaviour and be more engaged in democracy as a result of the exhibition.

However, not all visitors enjoyed the participatory experience. A small proportion of visitors expressed negative emotions, including frustration because of a technical—usually digital—malfunction but also when there were no ping-pong balls available. Several visitors expressed cynicism and concern relating to the expectation that visitors' comments would be forwarded to politicians, or a more general malaise that politicians did not listen to citizens. These responses show the risk of token participation (Verba 1961; Cornwall 2004; Marsh 2008; Vromen and Collin 2010). It also highlights the importance of adequate exhibition maintenance and resourcing for participatory exhibitions. The insufficient post-opening staffing (and staff engagement) and a lack of previous experience in long-running participatory exhibitions consisting of significant digital elements was an area that let down the *Power of 1* exhibition.

However, to demonstrate that I am not indulging in 'celebratory frenzies' (Carpentier and Dahlgren 2011) about participation, there is a further word of caution. Several visitors who valued, enjoyed and took part in the participatory nature of the exhibition insisted that participation was not for every exhibition or every topic. In her follow-up interview, P6 advised that participation should not take over all museum experiences and provided an analogy of how she preferred TV shows 'without other people's twitters running across the bottom'. P105 said that participation was about involvement, but that 'if it's something about private lives of old prime ministers, you wouldn't need to be too personally involved in that'. This suggests that the content of an exhibition should dictate whether participatory elements will be beneficial. The comments shared by visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition represented progressive views about politics and current affairs, and many of these were critical of Tony Abbott, who was prime minister during most of the exhibition. For visitors holding conservative views—who appeared to be in the minority in both the exit interview sample and the visitors attending the exhibition—participation resulted in an uncomfortable experience and left a small proportion of visitors (15.8%) feeling angry (P39), concerned (P47) or reluctant to disclose personal views. Some international tourists (P51 and P52) were surprised (but not afraid) to see Australians being so disrespectful of their national leader. The dissonance experienced by politically conservative museum visitors after they read other visitors' comments that opposed their own views would benefit from further research, especially given the risk of perceived partiality for publicly funded and, therefore, politically sensitive public museums. Relevant work (Jost et al. 2003) was conducted by psychologists into people holding politically conservative ideological belief systems and found that politically conservative people were resistant to change, had a high need for order and a low tolerance for uncertainty. The open-ended and participatory approach to developing the exhibition sometimes felt uncomfortable to both internal staff and external collaborators because they were not 'feeling the edges' (M3) that are usually present when outcomes and processes are defined or determined at the beginning of a project. By its nature, participation can be unsettling because it is unfamiliar, risky and challenges established relationships of power. Such feelings need to be understood and acknowledged if a participatory culture is to be introduced into the museum sector.

8.3.5 Digital versus tangible experiences

The introduction of technology into museums in the 1990s via multimedia and interactives was heralded as an opportunity to democratise both the museum experience and knowledge because information would then become widely available, and it could be flexible, personal and multi-vocal, appeal to new audiences (especially younger people) and be controlled by the visitor (G. F. MacDonald 1992; Witcomb 2006). This promise did not materialise because many professionals opposed technology on the grounds that it threatened museum authority, dumbed down the experience and did not change the core museum experience and culture by merely adding

technology to the mix (Griffiths 2003; Skartveit and Goodnow 2010). However, the more recent and widespread popularisation of the internet (e.g., Web 2.0 and social media) encouraged people to expect to contribute directly and personally to the creative process as 'prosumer, producer and consumer together' (P134) and 'From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers' (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000) and led to the embrace of participatory experiences in museums (F. Cameron 2006; McLean 2007; Simon 2010; Carpentier 2011a, 2011b; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011). The *Power of 1* case study, which presented tangible and digital approaches to participation, complicated the view of digital technologies as inevitably and intrinsically beneficial for participation despite being the catalyst for the museum participation trend. Most visitors preferred the tangible participatory activities, such as voting with a ball or writing on a wall, ballot or piece of paper. The four participatory activities most frequently mentioned by visitors during the interviews were tangible, consisting of the ping-pong ballot, secret ballot, graffiti wall and the Builder Room. The four least frequently mentioned participatory activities by visitors were mostly digital and consisted of the Gen X Room, Gen Y Room, message tree and Boomer Room. Although the lack of popularity of the digital participatory activities might be explained by the problems with technical maintenance (expressed as frustration in the visitors' interviews in their answers to questions 4 and 6, see Chapter 6), this case study suggests that visitors liked to participate but preferred tangible activities over digital ones. Additional research into this research question could prove valuable.

8.4 The future of museum participation

In addition to the findings of undemocratic practice by museum professionals and the meaning-making of visitors in participatory exhibitions, the case study brought to light the barriers and opportunities that could hinder or support the introduction of a participatory culture into museums.

8.4.1 A broader conceptualisation of participation

One of the challenges hindering the persistent pleas for democratisation is that these calls tend to have different and sometimes conflicting motives. The conflict between expertise and everyday knowledge is considered one of the oldest tensions in politics, dating back to Plato and Aristotle (Held 2006). In the context of participation, this conflict is one of the most confronting aspects for museum professionals who seek to retain the authority of the curator at the cost of welcoming new voices and perspectives into the museum. Democracy can be sceptical of expertise and seek to flatten hierarchies of power and knowledge. However, in a museum context, a more democratic culture would not seek to reject expertise but to value and respect its multiple sources. This is just one of many benefits of introducing a participatory culture to museums.

However, the case study illustrated that our conceptualisation of participation has been undemocratic and too narrow because it focused on what participation can do for the museum, rather than what it can do for the visitor. This was illustrated in three ways: how participation was measured, how visitors' comments were valued and how participation was situated within the museum experience (which was typically as an 'add-on' rather than an end, which could lead to a risk of token or manipulative participation in which one party continues to exercise control and makes decisions) (Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1976). These three aspects show that in the *Power of 1* case study, participation was defined from a supply rather than a demand perspective, which is similar to the learning paradigm approach to visitor research that maintains the status quo.

As was done on the *Power of 1* project, participation should not be judged on the basis of whether a visitor leaves a comment or makes a contribution within the museum space. To be truly democratic through promoting visitor agency and being inclusive, participation should be about creating an environment in which visitors can make the choice to participate or not to participate. As external museum collaborator M2 explained, 'Participation … is doing what you want to do, it's making your own choices within it'. Visitors were contributing to the exhibition experience even when they chose not to leave a comment. For instance, visitors participated in real or imagined conversations with and about other visitors' contributions and many collaborated and debated with their group of family or friends to craft a comment on behalf of their visiting group. Through viewing and reflection, personal connections were forged with the ideas and messages of the exhibition, which helped visitors' recall at both the time of the visit and some months later as was demonstrated in the follow-up interviews. As external collaborator M2 argued, the process of participation is more important than the product, in particular if the goal is to empower visitors and create a space for visitors to make their mark and claim a place in the world and the museum environment (McLean 2007; Simon 2010).

By extension, if participatory experiences are to be understood and offered in a broader and more democratic framework, then all visitors' comments and contributions must be considered valid, authentic and meaningful, rather than 'junk', 'silly' and 'selfies' (M9). Many comments were potentially 'off message' and even messy. Despite this, these messages did not lead to Kidd's (2011, 105) assertion of the 'mundane and banal' distractions that threaten democratic participation. In fact, the so-called 'mundane and banal' comments produced the opposite effect. The presence of these contributions helped to make the experience more authentic because it demonstrated that visitors had the freedom to have their say and share their views, and that the museum was not controlling the outcomes. It allowed visitors to make personal connections with other visitors by making judgements about the ages of people based on their handwriting and by seeing the faces or hearing the voices of 'everyday people' in the videos and audio files. It also signalled that the museum space was inclusive, active, multi-sensory, hands-on, interactive, accessible, less rule-laden,

two-way and thought-provoking. These are the many qualities that visitors indicated they valued in their interviews, rather than the passive, didactic (one-way) traditional museum approach. In contrast, though not consistent or widespread (in part because the allocated staff resources to maintain the exhibition declined and in part because of ongoing technological problems), the 'tidying up' of visitors' comments by staff could have diluted these democratic messages from the participatory experience. Controlled approaches undermine visitors' trust and willingness to contribute to participatory experiences as was shown in P119/F11's follow-up interview when she cautioned that participation was not democratic when it is delivered and conceived in a controlled format.

8.4.2 Avoiding token participation

As noted, participation is typically situated within the broader museum experience as an 'add-on' rather than the experience itself, which leads to a risk of token participation when power is not being shared in a mutually beneficial way with visitors and when the outcomes are controlled by the museum. That is, when the museum is not the participant but the controller. For instance, this is a common approach in all models proposed in Simon's (2010) *The Participatory Museum*, who advocated for the museum to retain a level of control and set the rules for participation. The *Power of 1* was an experimental exhibition and visitors commented how it was a welcome 'break' or 'change' from the rest of the museum, showing that it contrasted with other aspects of the MoAD experience. The museum professionals agreed that the participatory exhibition was an opportunity to try something new, do something different, entertaining and appealing for visitors of all ages and spark a conversation about democracy. The spirit of the exhibition's development was to 'set it free' in terms of museum practice and empowering visitors. However, the risk of token or manipulative participation was very real given the museum sector's long undemocratic history of controlling visitors, resisting change and shaping agendas (Pierson-Jones 1992; Sandell 2003; Ross 2004; Duncan 2005; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Takahisa 2011; Kidd 2014). The consequences of token participation were demonstrated by cross-disciplinary political science research of government program case studies that did not encourage participation by young people but sought to control them and guide their decisions, reinforcing powerlessness, cynicism and perceptions of elitism (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones 2007; Vromen and Collin 2010).

While the *Power of 1* sought to be democratic, open, inclusive, courageous and immediate, the conceptualisation of participation in the exhibition was limited in several ways and, thus, could be accused of token participation. First, as previously mentioned, participation was defined too narrowly as leaving a contribution and the 'quality' of visitors' contributions was judged according to the museum's values, rather than a democratic value of simply giving people the choice to have a voice. Second, participation and the spirit of open collaboration was conceived as critical to the

exhibition's development and launch phase when the project was predominantly led and implemented by external parties, but insufficient care and attention was given to the delivery and maintenance phases (run by internal staff) during its year-long showing to the public. Third, unlike the visitors to the *Power of 1* who participated in imagined conversations within and outside the exhibition and saw in it a relevant and ambitious role to bring issues to the attention of decision-makers, the project team failed to see its potential beyond the walls of the museum. Certainly, visitors were able to have their say and shape the content and experience of the exhibition, but no-one on the development team (including me) ever conceived that its influence would expand beyond the walls of the museum to the broader community. However, we were not alone in limiting our expectations. Simon (2010, 27) argued that the most progressive participatory visitor experience takes place within museum walls and 'makes the entire institution feel like a social place, full of potentially interesting, challenging, enriching encounters with other people'.

However, many visitors imagined the potential for a museum to affect change and be heard and there were multiple examples in the visitors' interviews of expectations or assumptions that the comments they wrote or read would be forwarded to politicians or other decision-makers. The visitors perceived that the exhibition experience was a legitimate forum—a public sphere—for canvassing and capturing citizens' views about politics, democracy and current affairs, no doubt in part because the museum is housed in the old parliament building. If the museum sector was more open to 'disciplinary borrowings' (Wedeen 2008), the sector could have applied the CLEAR model of participation from political science and considered the 'R' or 'response' phase of participation in which people need to feel they are listened to and their views, if not agreed with, will be taken into account. This model is based on research (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2006, 298) that found that one of the main obstacles to participation is the expectation that there will be no response to what citizens say. The *Power of 1* project team had a limited, museum-centric vision for the exhibition. Despite stating that we wanted to have a conversation with museum visitors, we were not prepared to respond to the conversation or were not really listening. We lacked the enterprise and ingenuity of the museum's visitors, who could see that the exhibition could influence a broader social audience and allow citizens' voices to be heard and responded to by politicians in a time when people felt voiceless and cynical (this will be discussed further below). Although nearly four in five visitors (79.8%) felt that participation was an effective approach in museums, 10% of these visitors cautioned that participation was effective only if the visitors' comments and views would be considered by, responded to and ultimately influence decision-makers (usually politicians). Therefore, museums must establish a participatory model that is genuine, not token or manipulative. This new model of participation needs to acknowledge and facilitate the potential for museums to play a role in broader societal issues and debate, not simply those that take place within museum walls. A more inclusive, relevant and expansive future of museums has been proposed by

museum social inclusion advocates (Sandell 1998, 2002b; Janes and Conaty 2005; Anderson 2012; Fleming 2013; Sandell, Dodd and Garland-Thomson 2013; Sandell and Nightingale 2013; Fleming 2014) and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) which is 'dedicated to transforming places that preserve the past into dynamic spaces that promote civic action on today's struggles' (ICSC). As recommended by the IAP2 (2014), museums can further learn from the fields of political science and citizen engagement and be transparent and accountable by clearly defining to the public how visitors' comments will be responded to and used.

8.4.3 Building commitment to democratic change

The open, iterative and participatory approach to the development of the *Power of 1* exhibition was described by external collaborators as 'real' (M1), 'ambitious' (M1), 'creative' (M2), 'remarkable' (M3) and 'trusting' (M6). The museum director (M5) felt that participation was the future of the museum and that the open-ended process felt 'exciting'. Internal staff member M7, who worked on the development of the project, described it as 'strange' and 'intense' and not a typical way to develop a museum exhibition. However, not long after the exhibition opened to the public, almost all professionals who were involved in the project had completed their contracts and left, and carriage and responsibility for the project was passed to internal staff and the museum director. After I had left the museum, I was advised by a staff member that the *Power of 1* was no longer a priority for the organisation. Though disappointing given the positive comments from the visitors' interviews, it was understandable because of the museum's frequent budget cuts and demands from competing priorities, which, for MoAD, included the refurbishment of a large and significant heritage building. As a result, much of the philosophy and intent of the exhibition became diluted when it became a 'business-as-usual' project without necessary financial and staffing resources and an internal champion. For instance, staff censored, edited and tidied the visitors' comments in a way that was not articulated in the agreed terms of use guidelines, the exhibition space was no longer attended by visitor services staff during busy visitation periods, repair and maintenance of the digital and tangible activities was slow or sporadic because of stability issues with some interactives and the exhibition was unevenly promoted to on-site visitors.

However, perhaps the greatest effect of this shift of responsibility to internal staff members who had little involvement in the exhibition's development was that staff unintentionally or otherwise undermined the exhibition. Internal staff responsible for supporting and delivering the exhibition post-opening characterised the *Power of 1* as an unsubstantial project that lacked depth and context, illustrating the culture of control and resistance to change that has characterised museum practice (Sandell 2003; Spock 2009; Simon 2010; Black 2012). Although these experienced staff members were entitled to dislike the exhibition and its unconventional approach, several comments made during the interviews showed that internal staff did not support the intent of the participatory

project and the changes these represented for the museum and its practice. The discourse used by museum staff will be examined below. However, I wish to make the point that the maximalist vision for participation that we conceived, applied and largely realised in the early development and launch phase of the *Power of 1* was ultimately constrained by the failure to bring all staff on board with the experimental participatory project. The museum director's decision to use mostly external collaborators to pursue a participatory and unconventional approach to the *Power of 1* was partly taken to circumvent internal resistance known to exist at MoAD towards the project. As M5 observed, 'It took a lot of work to get the museum to buy into the idea … nobody was willing to run with it … there was such a level of suspicion about the approach'. Based on the positive responses from visitors to the *Power of 1*, the decision to outsource a large proportion of the exhibition's development was, to a significant extent, sound and this strategy succeeded but only up to a point. Internal staff comments and actions demonstrated that they did not embrace the unconventional approach that would give visitors more agency and see a more open and less controlled and controlling role for the museum. However, there is hope. Internal staff member M7, a project manager with a long history of working in museums (and who left MoAD shortly before the exhibition launched), demonstrated an ability and openness to change her practice even though it felt to her at times uncomfortable, uncertain and frustrating. M7 preferred object-centred museum exhibitions and traditional project management frameworks, but she acknowledged that her confidence in the project and its participatory approach grew to a point where she 'started to feel a bit more confident that we were actually going to pull something off'. M7's reflections show that initial scepticism among museum staff towards open development approaches and participatory interpretation may be overturned in time given exposure to and experience in new ways of managing projects and designing museum experiences. Other internal staff members who delivered and maintained the exhibition were not closely involved in the exhibition's development, and perhaps did not understand the experimental approach that sought to produce an exhibition that did not look or feel like a traditional museum experience. As Fleming (2002, 221) advised, based on his own experience at National Museums Liverpool, internal resistance within museum organisations towards changes that aim to democratise should not be underestimated, and a combination of strong leadership and a 'wholesale corporate commitment' involving all museum parties is required to overcome the powerful opposition to change within museums. On reflection, for the participatory project to realise its goals—including those set by the museum, partners and visitors—a key component of the *Power of 1* strategy should have included greater emphasis on managing the resistance to change and building support within the museum beyond the exhibition launch to ensure that a holistic and sustainable approach to change was achievable.

The museum sector must acknowledge and respond to Takahisa's (2011) 'elephant in the room' of imbalanced power relations between practitioners and visitors to commit to mutually beneficial

participation (see also Spock 2009; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Takahisa 2011; Kidd 2014). One way to achieve this is through the development of a radical trust in which museums cede control of both the process and product of museum practice. I propose that this idea was successfully used in part during the *Power of 1* development process and the delivered exhibition product, and was demonstrated by the shared trust within the project team (museum professionals, including external and internal staff) and in the communities of visitors who participated in the exhibition. Drawing directly from the online library community's definition of radical trust, the project team was able to 'build something without setting in stone what it will be or trying to control all that it will be [and] … allow and encourage participants to shape and sculpt and be co-creators of the system' (Fichter 2006). This radical trust was recommended for museums by others, notably McLean (2007, 13) and Lynch and Alberti (2010, 15).

Where we failed on the *Power of 1* project was in not engaging at an earlier stage some of the internal staff who would take carriage of the participatory project. On reflection, we probably did not radically trust the internal staff to realise the vision for the project. There is no doubt that radical trust is a high-risk strategy for all parties involved in participation; however, it is essential to remove and address some of the entrenched undemocratic aspects that maintain distrust between different parties of museum practice. I believe it will ultimately produce a more rewarding and creatively satisfying museum practice for practitioners as demonstrated by the external collaborators' comments who described it as a real, honest, creative, professional and exciting experience.

8.5 Participatory museums are agents for change

This case study demonstrated that participation can make museums more democratic for several reasons. Participation opened up museum spaces for multiple voices and views, and was responsive to the needs of visitors who viewed traditional museum experiences as inadequate and expected to contribute to and not simply consume leisure experiences. Further, it broke down the singular and one-way authoritative voice of museums, and gave visitors a voice at a time when many members of society felt powerless and cynical about the democratic process. The case study also exposed that museums are undemocratic in multiple ways. For example, museum professionals define participation too narrowly (and on the museum's terms) and censor visitor contributions in an attempt to control the public face of the meaning being curated. Museum professionals shut down debate and undermine new approaches to museum interpretation using codes designed to exclude and distance such as 'authentic' and 'safe'. Museum professionals remain uninformed about their audiences, continuing to underestimate visitors and perceive them as passive, which retains curatorial authority and standard modes of practice, but also ensures that museum audiences will continue to be exclusive an unrepresentative. To avoid conflict, museum professionals use platitudes and will undermine in sometimes covert ways new interpretive approaches which

threaten the status quo, by reducing maintenance and promotion and subverting agreed policies such as the terms of use.

The maximalist model of participation applied a radical trust to share power with multiple parties during the exhibition development and delivery stages. This open model of participation presented contested views, opinions and processes that might be uncomfortable for a minority of visitors and staff however it also presented strong evidence to support a more democratic, relevant and inclusive future for museums. The changes needed to make museum culture democratic are achievable as long as training is provided for museum staff to better understand their visitors and learn to negotiate openly, honestly and respectfully in a manner that acknowledges and accepts that conflict and contestation are inevitable. In addition to these results, the most significant finding of this case study illustrated that museums can be effective agents for cultural change and social justice (Sandell 1998, 2002b; Janes and Conaty 2005) for three reasons. First, our visitors see that future for museums. Second, museums have a responsibility to influence and serve society. Last, museums have the potential to be role models for effective, influential and mutually beneficial participation.

8.5.1 Visitors imagine the future of museums

The exit and follow-up interviews with visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition showed that visitors envisaged a more ambitious and responsible role for museums than do museums themselves. Visitors envisaged museums giving voice to visitors, making connections with real and imagined communities and becoming a platform or conduit to bring issues and concerns to the attention of decision-makers. While MoAD and the team of external developers and internal staff anticipated a dynamic, open and honest conversation with visitors about the state of Australian democracy within the walls of the museum (which, in itself, was experimental and quite an ambitious project), the *Power of 1* visitors imagined even greater ambitons for those conversations. Significantly, many visitors assumed that their views, hopes, likes, dislikes, memories, jokes, insults, drawings, frustrations and complaints would find their way to politicians and other decision-makers and that the exhibition would be 'one more tool' to help politicians focus on 'the issues that the Australian community wants them to focus on' (P63/F2).

Other visitors showed how museums can be agents for change when they took part in imagined and real conversations with friends and family, museum staff, future and past visitors, decision-makers and power holders and communities to whom visitors may not otherwise have access. For P119, an Indigenous woman visitor, the 'gravity' of being in Old Parliament House and the reflections she shared with her sister—about the Redfern speech, tent embassy, Freedom rides and poor living conditions that continue to exist for many Indigenous communities—shaped her contributions and responses to the *Power of 1,* in which 'I was speaking to the people who I

imagined would be in the building … old, white men that make the decisions'. The invitation to participate provided P119 with a new 'space' that was not 'trapped' in a 'stuffy or traditional' way of doing things to reflect on and discuss politics 'in a different way that's not being angry or pissed off or fed up'.

Visitors such as P119 imagined that their voice would be heard, the act of participating in a museum exhibition would have an effect on society and their communities and that participation became a democratic, imagined conversation between individuals, the museum and society. This finding is very important in the context of many visitors who expressed cynicism, disillusionment and frustration about the voicelessness they experienced in society, particularly in regard to the widespread feeling among visitors that politicians—and especially the Abbott government—was not listening to the people. The feeling of wanting to be heard was not directed solely at politicians. Several visitors expressed a strong discord about the potential risk of putting time and thought into their contributions and the museum disregarding or not responding to the visitors' views and comments. These visitors sought reassurance that their voice counted and 'these bits of information … are not just going to be shredded at the end of it with no-one addressing it, no-one reading it' (P117). This demonstrates the importance for the museum sector to commit to participatory activities in a considered and genuine way, and that the risk of token participation is too great if the contributions are going to be ignored, undervalued or confined only within the walls of the museum.

Some visitors articulated a desire to use museums to both remember the past—for example, 'Let's just go through the nice building and relive its political history' (P1)—and reflect on the present in a way that might appeal to new and younger visitors. Museums can be spaces for young people to exchange points of view in a trusted and potentially constructive way and to feel connected and part of a community who share their views. As 16-year-old student P74 noted, it made her 'feel a sense of community, that it's not just me thinking that way, it's a lot of other people'. There is significant support among visitors for museums to engage in contemporary debate, such as the state of Australian democracy, and participate in real or imagined conversations with decision-makers and the community. In this way, visitors want to see museums embracing a more expansive and contemporary role that is relevant to their lived experiences.

8.5.2 Museums serving society

The imprimatur from visitors for museums to pursue a more expansive, relevant and socially inclusive role beyond their walls is critical. I agree with other scholars (Gaither 1992; Sandell 2002a; Anderson 2012) that with their large (albeit declining), publicly funded budgets, valuable collections and buildings and reputations as trusted and authoritative institutions, museums have a

responsibility to play a greater role in society for more than the privileged museum visitor. If the move towards democratisation of the museum sector is successful, which I have been advocating, then I would hope that the visitor profile would become more inclusive, museums would become places that would appeal to a more diverse group of visitors; therefore, more people would view museums as places where they would like to spend their time. This hope is not so that museums can increase their attendance figures, but for museums to meet their social responsibility to the many and diverse taxpayers who fund these institutions. I concede that with over a century of elitist and exclusionary museum practices and policies, greater diversity and representation among museum audiences will be extremely difficult to achieve. For museums to call themselves democratic and equitable, increased effort must be made to diversify museum audiences to appeal to more than the educated, middle-class and privileged visitor (Bennett 1995; Sandell 1998; S. Macdonald 2002a; Black 2005; Bounia et al. 2012; MGNSW 2015). Museums must be prepared to experiment more, take greater risks, become resilient and help people understand and respond to contemporary concerns as was shown in the *Power of 1* experimental project. Museums are important and trusted spaces and institutions that could be more relevant and responsible. Museums are not saving lives and are not essential for meeting people's basic needs of food, shelter and clothing, but they play a vital role in helping to build understanding and encouraging participation in society, and in provoking connections and conversations with real and imagined communities. As demonstrated at the socially inclusive National Museums Liverpool, it is possible to create 'a museum that inspires and uplifts people, that confronts them with ideas, that helps them understand a little more about themselves and their surroundings, [which is] … the best a museum can do' (Fleming 2002, 223).

8.5.3 Museums as exemplary participants

It is through these commitments to democratise the museum experience (through the use of participatory processes and products) and through acceptance of their social responsibilities that museums may become responsible participants in society. Drawing on Melucci's (1989, 174) two-part definition of participation (also used by Carpentier 2011b), museums can take part in and share power with the visitor and benefit society by 'belonging to a system and identifying with the "general interests" of the community'. This approach expands the commitment to participation beyond a symbolic gesture, marketing ploy or expression of rhetoric to one that accepts social responsibility. Museums are public spheres and as a community resource they can provide and take part in social training to develop attitudes and skills to participate in society (Pateman 1976; Sandell 2002a; Cornwall 2004; Simon 2010; Carpentier 2015). Visitors to the *Power of 1* at MoAD liked the opportunity to have their say about democracy, politics, politicians and current affairs. Certainly the site for this case study—Old Parliament House, home to the Australian parliament for over 60 years—was particularly suited to hosting a discussion about democracy and was, drawing on

Yanov's (2006, 352) reading of built spaces, 'a concrete representation of the more abstract, underlying meaning'. In this way, museums, specifically MoAD, are a valid response to calls for new public spheres and sites for the performance of democratic practices, such as participation. As proposed by Wedeen (2008, 111), there are 'different sites for enacting democracy, and a strong democracy needs to be using them all'.

8.6 Conclusion

The *Power of 1* case study of an experimental participatory exhibition about participating in democracy in a museum about democracy revealed the powerful and power-shifting potential of museum participation for museum professionals and visitors. This chapter considered key findings and themes from the *Power of 1* case study. It also identified the barriers and opportunities that will need to be addressed to support the introduction of a participatory culture and help museums become agents for change and social justice. Internal staff at MoAD used censorship, underestimated their visitors and upheld discourses that maintained the status quo. These museum professionals sought to retain curatorial control and resist change. Such issues and institutional cultures privilege expertise and, therefore, conspire to ensure professional practice remains undemocratic, exclusive and one-sided. Conversely, this study demonstrated the multiple ways that participation is meaningful to and relevant for visitors. Visitors to MoAD engaged in 'imagined conversations' with future and past visitors, decision-makers and communities to whom they may not otherwise have access. Participation requires a personal and immediate response and this helped to spark conversations, generate memories and activate visitor agency. From the perspective of visitors to the *Power of 1*, participatory approaches show the potential for museums to transform into a conduit to connect the voices, expertise and concerns of citizens to new communities, both real and imaginary. Such a transformation could make MoAD—and potentially other museums—more relevant, responsive and responsible. The final chapter (Chapter 9) will synthesise the key findings from this single-site case study, identify opportunities for further research and conclude this study to outline ways that participation can democratise the broader museum sector and make it more relevant and socially responsible.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

Participatory museums: a small piece in a bigger democratic puzzle

In Chapter 1, it was not hard to imagine that a museum practitioner of 20 years wanted to revitalise and improve her practice to find ways to make museums more inclusive, responsive, relevant and creative. The museum practitioner—me—drew on the advice, insights and enthusiasm of Simon's (2010) influential book *The Participatory Museum* to conceive, develop and deliver an experimental and participatory exhibition, *Power of 1*, on display for a year at MoAD in Canberra, Australia. The exhibition was informed by questioning the relevance of museums to diverse communities and findings that Australian citizens had become disillusioned towards politics. The *Power of 1* exhibition became the focus of this case study and set in motion a certain circularity: the research explored the democratisation of museums using a participatory exhibition about participating in democracy in a museum about democracy. In doing so, the case study produced particularly revealing findings given MoAD's specific interest and responsibility to be, or at least appear to be, democratic. MoAD is one of a small number of museums with democracy in its name, but it is certainly not the only museum with democratic obligations. For more than a century, alongside associated debate around inclusion and community engagement, museums have claimed that they will democratise, need to democratise or have a new idea or approach about how they are going to democratise (Boas 1907; Dana 1917; Halpin 1997; Abt 2006; S. Macdonald 2006; Fleming 2014). What that move to 'democratise' may mean is often unclear in the museum studies literature, perhaps purposely so. Such claims broadly represent a rhetoric that allows museum professionals to be viewed as doing something to become less elitist and more accessible. However, there are multiple instances in this case study and throughout history of museums retaining control, resisting change, serving mostly privileged audiences and avoiding sharing power with visitors (Pierson-Jones 1992; Ross 2004; Spock 2009; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Black 2012; Ashley 2014; Kidd 2014).

Previous and failed attempts to democratise museums were founded on and assessed according to the values of museum institutional cultures that privilege expertise and remain one-sided, exclusive and, therefore, undemocratic. The *Power of 1* case study was one of the first opportunities to examine participatory museum experiences in an Australian context. It was a direct response to calls for more theoretical grounding (S. Macdonald 2005; Sandell 2007; Anderson 2012; Smith 2015),

alongside qualitative, longitudinal and interdisciplinary research from the perspectives of visitors and museum professionals, to understand the effect and efficacy of participatory experiences and how power is mediated, negotiated and situated in museums. Three new bodies of data were generated and interpreted, and consisted of semi-structured interviews with museum professionals, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with visitors at the time of their visit and semi-structured longitudinal interviews with visitors several months after their visit. The research design encouraged museum professionals to reflect on the development and delivery of the participatory exhibition to determine how museum culture facilitates or obstructs attempts to democratise the museum experience. Drawing on an increasing concern in museology to understand and recognise visitors' agency and active meaning-making, the case study also sought to understand how visitors, in their own words, perceive, understand and make meaning from participatory experiences (Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; S. Macdonald 2005; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012; Smith 2015).

Findings from the museum professionals' interviews were meaningful, if at times uncomfortable—in particular responses from some internal museum staff who were responsible for the post-opening delivery and maintenance of the exhibition. For instance, internal museum staff relied on personal, anecdotal and untested opinions to evaluate and sometimes undermine proposed visitor experiences and approaches, including participation.[7] Unlike the external collaborators who, when they could not provide an answer as to how visitors might experience the exhibition, acknowledged that they would like to know that information, some museum staff made bold and definitive statements about how visitors might or might not experience the exhibition or stated how they personally would experience the *Power of 1*. This discomfort and fear did not correlate with the actual experiences, needs, responses, abilities and meaning-making of the visitors interviewed for this case study. The use of rhetoric and false compliments by some internal staff (M8), as well as language that can be designed to shut or slow down debate, such as 'safe' and 'authentic' (M9), could be used as tools to resist change and ultimately inhibit the museum sector's ability to democratise (Sandell 2002b; Ross 2004; Spock 2009; Fleming 2013).

The museum professionals determined that contributions from visitors were allowed to stay in the museum only under certain conditions. According to the staff members who maintained the space and moderated the comments, the visitors' contributions needed to be neat, serious and on curatorial message. The organic and authentic sense of meaning-making by the visitors was curtailed. If heritage is about making meaning—constructing and negotiating meaning (Dicks 2000; Smith 2006; S. Macdonald 2013)—then the museum staff were attempting to control the public

[7] Some of the attitudes and values expressed by museum staff in the interviews illustrate the intrinsic cultural obstacles of museum practice, but they are problems of the sector and not of individuals. The views expressed are heard in the institutions I have worked in and would be acceptable to many within the sector. I chose not to 'name and shame' these respected colleagues and friends, but to learn from this case study experience, and through that strengthen the sector and increase the likelihood of its democratisation.

face of the meaning being curated. The museum staff endorsed a particular message and attempted to erase those contributions that made them uncomfortable. Staff were not prepared to lose control of the content, and the museum continued to set the rules, constrain options, influence people's desires and preferences and shape agendas. It is true that a very small number—'half a dozen or less' (M9)—of visitors' contributions were in breach of the terms of use guidelines developed by MoAD because they were 'racist, sexist, homophobic, obscene, or threatening' (MoAD 2014a). However, this is a risk of participation and some voices are not appropriate to give space to on a public platform. Such a risk can be managed by establishing, facilitating and adequately staffing a terms of use policy to transparently justify removal of comments to ensure that all visitors are treated with respect and courtesy. In the *Power of 1* case study, the greater risk occurred when museum staff removed numerous 'junk' messages that were of 'no value' or 'messy' to tidy the space and make room for so-called 'authentic contributions' (M9) (MoAD 2015a). The potential power of participation could not be realised in full because of the inherent but often unacknowledged undemocratic culture and practice still operating at MoAD and potentially in other museums. Museum practitioners seek to control and minimise visitor agency when they remove messy and off-message visitors' comments, which demeans the value of visitors' contributions by determining which comments are 'authentic'. Further, museum practitioners underestimate or fail to listen to visitors and focus too greatly on benefits to the museum rather than for the broader community. Museum professionals and scholars have failed to be democratic by not accommodating multiple perspectives, being relevant to and inclusive of diverse audiences, meeting social responsibilities and respecting visitor agency. However, there is hope. Some internal museum staff (M7) demonstrated an ability and openness to change their practice even though it felt to them at times uncomfortable, uncertain and frustrating. The open-ended collaboration with external museum professionals who approached the project from the visitor perspective was, to an extent, a successful strategy by the museum director to influence internal culture and processes.

After more than a century of museums talking among themselves about how to democratise, this case study invited visitors to reflect on and share their views about democracy and how to make museums democratic. Findings from the visitor research were original and surprising. Visitors to the *Power of 1* liked participation, the opportunity to have a say and to connect with other citizens. In doing so, they subverted the typical power relations within museums and helped to make the experience more democratic. Visitors to the *Power of 1* showed a deep engagement with the participatory elements of the exhibition, including the opportunity to have their say and to read and review other visitors' comments. Most visitors in the follow-up interviews felt that participation was democratic because they could choose to participate or not to participate, and could shape their own experience and share in decisions that affected them. The opportunity to read or contribute comments to the exhibition helped the interviewees to relate the content of the exhibition to their

personal experiences. Even though most visitors had no previous experience of participatory exhibitions, they were able to understand and make meaning from the unconventional display approach. A staggering 84.9% of visitors recalled information or messages from the exhibition that directly related to the intended themes and aims as defined by the exhibition's organisers. Of the 140 visitors interviewed, six people said that they would participate more actively in politics as a result of the exhibition, noting that the exhibition showed there were multiple ways to engage in democracy. As P58 said, 'You don't just have to join a party'. This result should be compared with research across three countries by Smith (2017 and personal communication 2017), who interviewed 4,504 visitors at non-participatory exhibitions, and found that only 37% of visitors took away active and engaged messages from the exhibitions, at least 25% of visitors took away no messages at all and only four people out of more than 4,500 were inspired to change their behaviour.

From the visitors' perspective (as well as some museum professionals'), participation presented a compelling and democratic alternative to traditional museum experiences: active versus passive, conversation versus didactic and multiple versus singular voices. Participatory experiences represent an abandonment of some of the values that have defined traditional museums, built their exclusive audiences and continue to limit their relevance in today's society. It is this binary opposition of traditional versus participatory museum experiences that may explain why some museum staff resist the move to a participatory culture and why many visitors embrace it.

Given the historic lack of adequate visitor research within museums (Bitgood and Shettel 1996; S. Macdonald 2002b, 2005; Sandell 2007; Smith 2015), it might be hard to imagine that museum visitors envisage a more ambitious, relevant, responsible, responsive and therefore democratic future for museums than do some museum professionals. Visitors to the *Power of 1* exhibition engaged in real or imagined conversations within the museum with family and friends as well as future and past visitors, and beyond its walls with decision-makers and power holders, both living and dead. When they participated in the exhibition by writing a comment, casting a vote, discussing an answer with their group or reflecting on another visitor's contribution, visitors were responding personally and immediately to the content of the exhibition (including other visitors' contributions). This sparked conversations, shared jokes, generated memories, made meaning and activated visitor agency. In doing so, museum visitors uncovered the powerful (and power-shifting) potential of museum participation when they imagined the museum as a platform to connect their voices, concerns and expertise to communities, both real and imaginary, to whom they may not otherwise have access. Museum visitors revealed how MoAD, and perhaps other museums, could become more relevant and in accordance with the goals of the current phase of museum studies and its interest in social inclusion, activism and responsibilities to the broader community. Redolent of Anderson's (2006, 6) imagined communities but not necessarily limited by nationalism, visitors to

the *Power of 1* likely never met but felt connected by shared views, frustrations, memories, identities or sense of humour. This substantial finding forges a role for museums to connect citizens who may be isolated from and even unknown to communities to whom they should feel supported and connected.

A core argument of this research is that a material commitment to democratisation of the museum sector is long overdue. New attempts to democratise, such as participation, need to identify new and interdisciplinary ways to recognise and respond to the institutional cultures and issues that privilege expertise and conspire to ensure professional practice remains undemocratic. In political science, Stoker (2006) argued that it essential that the interests of citizens are known in democratic decision-making, and Held (2006, 1) noted that although definitions of democracy can be ambiguous, it broadly means 'the people rule' and that there is equality. Participatory experiences give visitors a voice about what they value in museums and a platform to express and respond to their concerns in broader society, in particular if offered with little or no filtering by a curator or other museum professional. The likelihood of this occurring may be increased if the museum sector embraces the CLEAR framework (from political science) to encourage effective and sustainable participation. People are most likely to participate when they believe or have experienced that their contribution is going to make a difference and be listened or 'responded to' (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2006, 298). Participation allows for authentic listening and responding to museum visitors and understanding what they value. It is through this wholehearted transparency and openness that museum culture may be able to change. This enthusiasm for the benefits of participation within museums is not misplaced. Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of decision-making achieved through participation were demonstrated in the field of development studies and helped to achieve lasting and improved outcomes that were supported and understood by communities (Hickey and Mohan 2004). Is it not ironic that after a century of talking among ourselves about the need to democratise, we discover that one way to democratise museums is to listen to the people—our visitors—and to give them a voice to connect with real and imagined communities about issues and concerns that matter to them?

During its development phase, the *Power of 1*'s model of participation was inspired by Simon's (2010) popular *The Participatory Museum*. Through the course of this research, it is clear in hindsight that the *Power of 1* pursued an accidentally maximalist model of participation that was described by participation scholar Carpentier (2011a, 2015) as a desirable yet utopian fantasy. This maximalist model eventuated only after a series of fortunate events, decisions and coincidences. A largely external team of professionals who were open to innovating and taking risks directed and implemented an overtly experimental project as a strategy to sidestep the resistance from internal staff. A small but national institution with relatively low visitation was prepared to take risks to increase its profile and relevance. A new museum director who arrived from outside the museum

sector was not bound by traditional museum operating practices and culture. A deeply unpopular prime minister and his policies and decisions were enthusiastically opposed by the mostly progressive visitors to the exhibition, who expressed their dissatisfaction at a time when Australian citizens had become disillusioned towards politics and politicians and were exploring new ways, outside of the ballot box, to have their say (Evans, Stoker and Nasir 2013; IGPA 2014). It is fair to say that such conditions are unlikely to be replicated in such an accidental fashion again; indeed, it would be unlikely for conditions to be intentionally replicated. However, in the context of ongoing debate about the new museology and social inclusion, the *Power of 1* case study illustrated how museum participation is able to redress the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and democratise MoAD to become a relevant, responsible, diverse and multi-vocal platform for the wider social good.

The findings from the *Power of 1* case study are powerful and power-shifting. However, as noted, this single-site case study is limited in its ability to make generalisations to broader contexts and other museum environments. Further research is needed at other museum sites in Australia (particularly those with a commitment to and remit to address democratic museum experiences) to better understand the ways that museum participation may democratise museums when many previous attempts have failed. The disjunction (Lavine 1992) between what museum professionals think visitors will do and what they actually do in an exhibition was illustrated in this case study, and further research in other museum contexts could reveal the extent of this gap across the sector and whether it consciously or unknowingly takes place. Additional visitor research would also be beneficial to educate museum professionals about their visitors so they would not need to rely on their personal anecdotes. Research into visitors' perceptions of traditional museum experiences is needed at other sites to better understand the relationship between 'thinking'—in the way visitors want to be stimulated during their visit when they said a visit 'makes you think'—and participatory experiences. Further, the fetishisation of the object by museum professionals (S. Macdonald 2002b, 2013) and the widespread use of text panels and object labels in most museums should be interrogated in light of visitor comments such as, 'Rather than a dry artefact … you've got this [participatory exhibition] which is good, it's interactive … it's a question and it's an answer' (P12), and, 'You pay more attention to what you're doing, instead of just, like, reading a slab on the wall that says what a painting means … you get to actually read what to do, do it, then take it all in while you're doing it. And while you do it, you remember it all' (P100). Despite cautions from some internal museum professionals who were involved in the maintenance and post-launch delivery of the exhibition, visitors were able to understand and make meaning from the unconventional display approach (even though most visitors had no previous experience of participatory exhibitions). The majority of visitors took messages from the *Power of 1* exhibition that related to the intended themes and aims as defined by the exhibition's organisers, resulting in higher engagement and lower 'no

message' responses compared with non-participatory exhibitions (Smith personal communication 2017). Further research is needed to compare visitor engagement in participatory and non-participatory exhibitions across different museum sites to determine if the findings in the MoAD case study can be reproduced and, therefore, if they could be used to improve museum practice.

To further improve museum practice, additional research is needed to interrogate the *Power of 1* visitors' preference for tangible participatory experiences in favour of digital. Although the lack of popularity for the digital participatory activities might be explained by the problems with technical maintenance and inadequate staff resourcing post-opening, this case study suggests that visitors liked to participate but preferred tangible over digital activities. Given the large budgets spent in museums on digital interactives, this is an area that would benefit from further research across other museum sites. Similarly, the finding that politically conservative museum visitors to the *Power of 1* experienced dissonance and discomfort when they read other visitors' comments that opposed their own views would benefit from further research. Research by psychologists found that people holding a politically conservative ideological belief system had a low tolerance for uncertainty, a high need for order and structure and were resistant to change (Jost et al. 2003). These findings could be usefully explored in other museum contexts to understand issues of political sensitivity of visitors holding conservative political views when participation welcomes the views of citizen experts in the context of publicly funded and, therefore, politically vulnerable public museums.

Following the strong views of visitors who assumed their comments and views would be presented to and heard by decision-makers and other stakeholders, the *Power of 1* case study strongly suggests the potential for a broader and more socially responsible role for MoAD and other museums. The *Power of 1* participatory exhibition appeared more likely to inspire visitors to change their behaviour than did traditional museum experiences. In this context, additional research is needed to better understand the lasting and longitudinal effects of such claims. In the spirit of 'disciplinary borrowings' (Wedeen 2008), it would also be beneficial to explore the value of political science's CLEAR model of participation (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2006, 298) to determine if the 'response' phase of participation—in which people need to feel that they are being listened to and their views will be taken into account—could encourage visitors to participate in MoAD and other museum environments to support calls for museums to play a more expansive and relevant role in society. As visitors to the *Power of 1* imagined, such a response mechanism could help museums to have a broader societal influence and allow citizens' voices to be heard and responded to by politicians during a time when people felt voiceless and cynical (Evans, Halupka and Stoker 2014). These findings support calls to maximise opportunities for citizens to take part in social training to develop attitudes and skills to play a more active role in making decisions that will affect their lives (Pateman 1976; Sandell 2002b; Cornwall 2004; Stoker 2006; Simon 2010; Carpentier 2015).

The findings from the *Power of 1* case study suggest that museum professionals continue to sustain undemocratic professional practices that privilege expertise, resist change and are exclusive. Therefore, additional research is recommended in several areas. For instance, research is needed to understand and acknowledge professionals' feelings of discomfort and risk aversion when they trial new approaches and cannot 'feel the edges' (M3) to establish more balanced relationships of power and introduce a participatory culture into the sector. The notion of 'radical trust' (Lynch and Alberti 2010) needs to be further explored, including in relation to internal museum staff. One aspect in which the *Power of 1* project failed was in not engaging at an earlier stage some of the internal staff who would take carriage of the participatory project. On reflection, we probably did not radically trust the internal staff to realise the vision for the project. This ultimately undermined the project when internal staff inadequately supported the project post-opening (after the external team and contractors had left), including through diminished maintenance and marketing and unilaterally overruling the agreed terms of use. Radical trust is a high-risk strategy for all parties involved in participation but is essential to remove and address some of the entrenched undemocratic aspects that maintain distrust between different parties of museum practice. Similarly, additional research is needed to explore the best ways to support museum staff to learn to negotiate openly, honestly and respectfully in a way that acknowledges and accepts that conflict and contestation are inevitable during consultation and the renegotiation of power relations.

What emerges from the results of this study is that, for the museum sector to realise the potential of participation, a more expansive conceptualisation of museum participation needs to be developed. In particular, it must include provisions for opportunities to participate or *not* participate. That is, visitors must be afforded the choice to engage or not engage in participatory exhibitions through multiple, unstructured and supported options to be involved. There is also a need to reconsider how and why professionals censor visitors' contributions (that comply with the terms of use but are considered messy or off message) and, thus, attempt to control the public face of the meaning being curated. Further, it would be useful to understand why professionals continue to underestimate and speak on behalf of visitors rather than be responsive, relevant and accurately representative of the needs and interests of a diverse and inclusive audience. Participation is an opportunity to reflect on the limiting aspects of museum practice and engage more transparently and creatively with visitors to help to redress the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations.

With large (albeit declining), publicly funded budgets, valuable collections and buildings and reputations as trusted and authoritative institutions, museums need to become more relevant and responsible. Museums are not saving lives and are not essential for meeting people's basic needs of food, shelter and clothing, but they play a vital role in helping to build understanding and encouraging participation in society and, as the *Power of 1* visitors illustrated, provoking connections

and conversations with real and imagined communities. Museums have a responsibility to expand their appeal and relevance beyond the privileged museum visitor and break down their exclusionary and elite status that acts as a barrier to potential visitors who have a right to participate in museums. With more than a century of elitist and exclusionary practices and policies in museums, greater diversity and representation among museum audiences will be extremely difficult to achieve. For museums to call themselves democratic and equitable, increased efforts must be made to diversify museum audiences to appeal to more than the educated, middle-class, privileged visitor (Bennett 1995; Sandell 1998; S. Macdonald 2002b; Black 2005; Bounia et al. 2012; MGNSW 2015). By allowing space for diverse voices and views and responding to visitors' perceptions of museums, museums may then become places that appeal to a more diverse group of visitors. This hope is not so that museums can increase their attendance figures, but to meet our social responsibility to the many and diverse taxpayers who fund these institutions.

As sites for imagined conversations, museums could remake themselves as both democratic in principle and practice and as sites that could help to build democratic renewal and community engagement. Visitors to the *Power of 1* perceived that the exhibition experience was a legitimate forum—a public sphere—for canvassing and capturing citizens' views about politics, democracy and current affairs. This was undoubtedly in part because the museum is housed in Old Parliament House. Visitors made connections from the themes of the exhibition to their own lives, thought about the past in the present and indicated they would change their behaviour and be more engaged in democracy as a result of the exhibition. They were encouraged to be engaged and connected citizens. This demonstrates that museums can play a role in broader societal issues and debate, not simply those that take place within our walls (Sandell 1998, 2002a; Janes and Conaty 2005; Anderson 2012; Fleming 2013; Sandell, Dodd and Garland-Thomson 2013; Sandell and Nightingale 2013; Fleming 2014). Many visitors imagined that their voice would be heard and the act of participating in a museum exhibition influenced society and their communities. This finding is very important in the context of many *Power of 1* visitors who expressed cynicism, disillusionment and frustration about the voicelessness they experienced in society, particularly in regard to the widespread feeling among visitors that politicians were not listening to the people. However, the feeling of wanting to be heard was not directed solely at politicians. Several visitors expressed a strong discord about the potential risk of putting time and thought into their contributions and the museum disregarding or not responding to the visitors' views and comments. Museum participation must actively avoid becoming merely token or manipulative when power is not being shared in a mutually beneficial way with visitors and when the outcomes are controlled by the museum. Museums can re-work themselves to become participants rather than facilitators of participation.

Museums must be prepared to experiment more, take greater risks, become resilient and help people understand and respond to contemporary concerns as was shown in the *Power of 1*

experimental project. MoAD has a responsibility and the opportunity to empower people to participate more deeply with democracy and current affairs, have their say, connect members of communities who they otherwise may not meet and potentially respect the democratic traditions and experiences that citizens and politicians have a responsibility to uphold, renew and strengthen.

It is in this way that the *Power of 1* exhibition at MoAD came full circle. Initially conceived as a exhibition through which to re-engage citizens with democracy within a museum space dedicated to democracy, the *Power of 1* case study showed how an experimental exhibition was able to spark a conversation with visitors about the practice, process and product of participating in democracy, and it illustrated the potential for the museum sector to address the frustrations of voicelessness in society and the disaffection among citizens towards politics and politicians. Thus, in the context of evolving debate about the new museology and social inclusion and despite previous failed attempts to democratise the sector, this case study demonstrated that participation may be able to address the power imbalance of traditional museum–visitor relations and democratise museums to become relevant, responsible, diverse and multi-vocal platforms for the wider social good. As a site for imagined conversations, MoAD could remake itself as both democratic in principle and practice and as a site for democratic renewal and community building. MoAD, and potentially museums more broadly, could finally, truly and expansively become democratic by becoming participants in imagined and real communities. Participatory museums are much more than the latest marketing trend or a chance to capture a visitor's comment. Participatory museums are a small piece in a bigger puzzle about democratic engagement: museum participation itself could become a democratic, imagined conversation between individuals, the museum and society.

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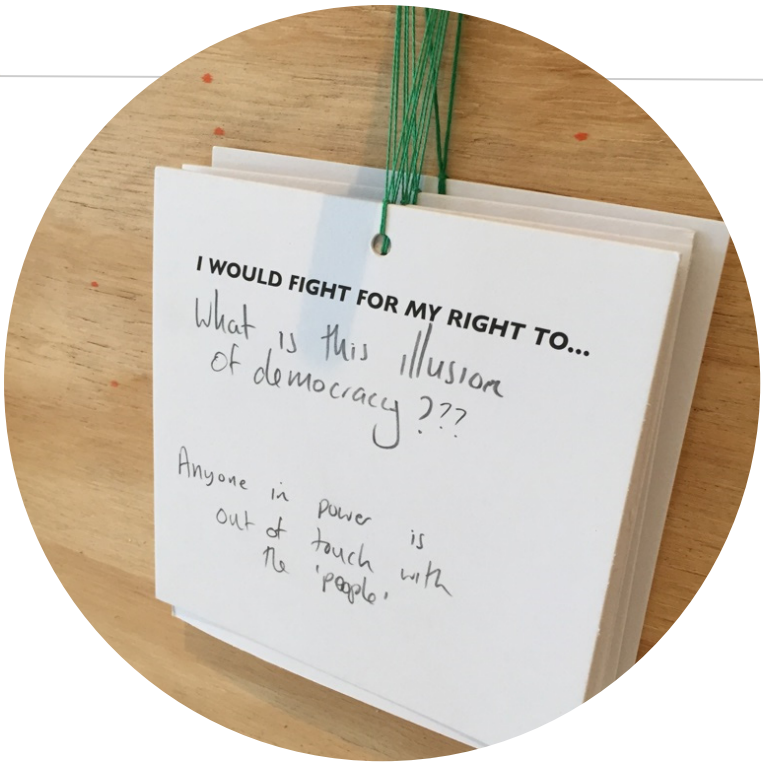
I WOULD FIGHT FOR MY RIGHT TO...
What is this illusion of democracy ???
Anyone in Power is out of touch with the 'people'

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS' INTERVIEWS

Reference code	Name (or attribution)	Organisation	Interview venue	Date of interview	Date of verification
M1	Michela Ledwidge	MOD Productions	Skype	11/02/2015	25/03/2015
M2	Mish Sparks	MOD Productions	Skype	11/02/2015	20/03/2015
M3	Geoff Hinchcliffe	University of Canberra	University of Canberra	11/02/2015	25/03/2015
M4	Mitchell Whitelaw	University of Canberra	University of Canberra	20/02/2015	19/03/2015
M5	Daryl Karp	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	24/02/2015	27/03/2015
M6	Mark Evans	University of Canberra	University of Canberra	5/03/2015	20/03/2015
M7	Project Manager	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	13/03/2015	20/03/2015
M8	Education and Visitor Services	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	4/08/2015	26/10/2015
M9	Exhibitions delivery	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	4/08/2015	27/10/2015
M10	Front of house	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House	5/08/2015	23/10/2015

APPENDIX BI: MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS' INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q1 Can you describe your role in the *Power of 1* exhibition development?

Q2 Do you have any role in the *Power of 1* exhibition now it is opened?

Q3 Tell me about your understanding of the history of the *Power of 1* exhibition, what led to the decision to mount this exhibition?

Q4 What is your understanding of the aims of the exhibition?

Q5 What are the key messages that you hope visitors will take away from the exhibition?

Q6 What is the demographic of visitors to the Museum?
Do you think the *Power of 1* exhibition will change that, was increasing your demographic an aim of the exhibition etc?

Q7 Do you think certain museum visitors are more likely to participate?

Q8 What does participation in a museum environment mean to you?

Q9 Have you been involved in any participatory experiences in a museum context?
If yes, describe these and whether they were effective

Q10 Do you think there is something about participating in a museum environment that's different?

Q11 Would you describe the *Power of 1* as a participatory exhibition? In what ways?

Q12 Do you think that participation is an effective interpretation tool in a museum environment?
Why/why not?

Q13 Do you anticipate any risks in using participatory experiences in a museum context?
for the museum?
for the visitor?

Q14 How would you describe the exhibition development process used for *Power of 1*? (Linear? Iterative?)

Q15 How did the exhibition/project development process feel to you?

Q16 Would you use this exhibition development process/style again?

Q17 What would have improved the exhibition development process?

Q18 What were your expectations at the beginning of the exhibition development process? Were they met?

Q19 How can this case study of *Power of 1* participatory experiences be meaningful for you and your work?

APPENDIX BII: COMBINED VISITOR SERVICES, EDUCATION AND EXHIBITIONS DELIVERY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I'd like to start with some broad questions about participation.		
QOLI1	Judgement q	Is participation good or bad?
QOLI2	Elaboration prompt	Why do you say that? Please say more
QOLI3a	Example prompt	Can you give an example from *Power of 1* where participation has been good/bad (same as their response)?
QOLI3b	Example prompt	Can you give an example from *Power of 1* where participation has been bad (opposite from their response)?
QOLI4	Internal logic q	Earlier you said xxx Now you are saying xxx Can you explain what you mean by xx and 'not xxx'
QOLI5	Restatement q	If I understand correctly, you are saying that…
QOLI6	Direct q	To you, what is participation? Expand if possible
Now I'd like to ask some specific questions which relate to your visitor services role		
FOH1		Are visitors asking you any questions when they're in *Power of 1*? What questions are visitors asking?
FOH2		What are you seeing visitors doing in *Power of 1*?
FOH3		How does it make you feel to be delivering a participative exhibition to visitors?
Now I'd like to ask some specific questions that relate your role in Learning programs at MoAD		
ED1		Are students asking you any questions when they're in *Power of 1*? What questions are school children asking?
ED2		What are you seeing school students doing in *Power of 1*?
ED3		From an education learning perspective, what would you do differently next time in an exhibition that seeks participation?
ED4		How does it make you feel to be delivering a participative exhibition to school visitors?
Finally I'd like to ask some general questions that I'm asking everyone involved in PO1		
Q1	Reflecting Museum prof interviews	Can you describe your role in the *Power of 1* exhibition?
Q4	Reflecting Museum prof interviews	What is your understanding of the aims of the exhibition?
Q5	Reflecting Museum professionals interviews	What are the key messages that you hope visitors will take away from the exhibition?
Q6	Reflecting Museum professionals interviews	What is the demographic of visitors to the Museum? Do you think the *Power of 1* exhibition will change that, was increasing your demographic an aim of the exhibition etc?

Q7	Reflecting Museum prof interviews	Do you think certain museum visitors are more likely to participate?
Q8	Reflecting Museum prof interviews	What does participation in a museum environment mean to you?
Q10	Reflecting Museum professionals interviews	Do you think there is something about participating in a museum environment that's different?
Q11	Reflecting Museum prof interviews	Would you describe the *Power of 1* as a participatory exhibition? In what ways?
Q12	Reflecting Museum professionals interviews	Do you think that participation is an effective interpretation tool in a museum environment? Why/why not?
Q13	Reflecting Museum professionals interviews	Do you anticipate any risks in using participatory experiences in a museum context? for the museum? for the visitor?
Q19	Reflecting Museum professionals interviews	How can this case study of *Power of 1* participatory experiences be meaningful for you and your work?
After interview record general observations		

APPENDIX C: VISITOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

APPENDIX D: VISITOR EXIT INTERVIEWS QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1 Why did you visit the *Power of 1* exhibition today?

Q2 Is PO1 a different kind of museum experience?

Q3 Did you participate in any of the interactives?

Q4 How did you feel when you participated in those interactives?

Q5 Which interactives did you most enjoy?

Q6 Do you think there is any way the interactives could be improved?

Q6b Did you choose to share the response you gave on social media?

Q7 [if didn't participate] why didn't you participate?

Q8 Did you read or review other visitors' contributions?

Q9 Can you remember one? What was memorable?

Q10 How did you feel when you were reading the other visitor comments?

Q11 Have you participated in an exhibition like this before where visitors are asked to share responses?

Q12 How does it make you feel to visit this exhibition?

Q13 So what messages about Australian democracy do you take away from this exhibition?

Q14 What meaning does an exhibition like this have for contemporary Australia?

Q15 Do you think this style of exhibition—where visitors contribute—is an effective approach?

Q16 Would you recommend this exhibition to a friend?

Anything else to add?

APPENDIX E: VISITOR FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Follow up ref	Number		Original interview Date	Follow up interview date	Sample number	Interview code	Visiting with	Gender	Age	Occupation (Main earner)	Highest educational qualification	Residence - postcode or country	Response Agreed/ decline/nil
F1	3	5	Tues 6 Jan 2015	Wed 29 July 2015	P3	I3	Friend	Male	C: 25-34	scientist	4: undergraduate university degree	2603	Agreed
F2	12	67	Thurs 8 Jan 2015	Tuesday 4 August 2015	P63	I31	Alone	Female	D: 35-44	public servant	4: undergraduate university degree	2602	Agreed
F3	9	31	Wed 7 Jan 2015	Tuesday 4 August 2015	P26	I14	Family	Female	D: 35-44	engineer	4: undergraduate university degree	3109	Agreed
F4	5	8	Tues 6 Jan 2015	Tuesday 4 August 2015	P6	I4	Couple	Female	G: over 65	escort drivers	2: year 10 or equivalent	3658	Agreed
F5	10	52	Thurs 8 Jan 2015	Wed 5 August 2015	P48	I24	Family	Female	E: 45-54	lawyer	5: postgraduate university degree	6164	Agreed
F6	14	80	Tues 20 Jan 2015	Fri 7 August 2015	P76	I36	Family	Female	D: 35-44	Driver	5: postgraduate university degree	2146	Agreed
F7	11	62	Thurs 8 Jan 2015	Fri 7 August 2015	P58	I29	Couple	Male	C: 25-34	Students	4: undergraduate university degree	2151	Agreed
F8	15	79	Tues 20 Jan 2015	Sat 8 August 2015	P74	I36	Family	Female	A: under 17	Driver	8: Still at school	2146	Agreed
F9	6	15	Tues 6 Jan 2021	Wed 12 August 2015	P10	I8	Couple	Male	D: 35-44	Defence	5: postgraduate university degree	0810	Agreed
F10	1	1	Tues 6 Jan 2015	Wed 19 August 2015	P1	I1	Couple	Male	F: 55-64	Professor	5: postgraduate university degree	2615	Agreed
F11	16		Friday 21 August 2015	Friday 21 August 2015	P119	I55	Family	Female	D: 35-44	Policy advisor	5: postgraduate university degree	2615	Agreed
-	2	4	Tues 6 Jan 2015	Did not reply	P2	I3	Friend	Female	C: 25-34	public servant	4: undergraduate university degree	2601	Nil
-	4	6	Tues 6 Jan 2015	Did not reply	P4	I3	Friend	Male	C: 25-34	public servant	1: year 12 or equivalent	2601	Bounceback
-	7	21	Wed 7 Jan 2015	Did not reply	P16	I10	Family	Female	D: 35-44	Business owner	5: postgraduate university degree	2533	Nil
-	8	24	Wed 7 Jan 2015	Did not reply	P19	I11	Family	Male	D: 35-44	trade	6: Trade/technical qualification/apprenticeship	2615	Nil
-	13	75	Thurs 8 Jan 2015	Did not reply	P71	I34	Family	Female	E: 45-54	public servant	6: Trade/technical qualification/apprenticeship	2905	Nil

APPENDIX F: FOLLOW-UP VISITOR INTERVIEWS QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to take part in follow-up interview, and to be audio recorded.

A. Memories

FQ1 What do you remember about the *Power of 1* exhibition at the Museum of Old Parliament House?

FQ2 Have you thought about or talked about the exhibition since you left Old Parliament House?

a. If yes: can you tell me about that?
b. Did you discuss it with someone you visited with or someone else?

FQ3 Did you take any photos or use social media relating to the exhibition?

a. If yes, can you tell me about the photos/social media? Would you like to share it with me?

FQ4 When you think of the *Power of 1* exhibition now, how does it make you feel?

FQ5 The exhibition had a number of opportunities to interact (or 'participate'), where you write or type an answer to a question or share your views. Do you remember if you participated in any of the interactives? Which one/s?

FQ6 Can you remember reading any other visitor's responses in the exhibition?

a. If yes—can you tell me about that what you remember? How did it make you feel?

FQ7 Have you, since your visit, reflected on issues associated with Australian democracy?

a. If yes—can you tell me about that reflection?
b. (If so), did your memories of the *Power of 1* exhibition play a part in the reflection?

B. Participation

PQ1 The exhibition is trialling participation, where visitors interact with and participate in the exhibition, and their answers shape the experience. Do you think participation is a good or bad approach in a museum? Why? Judgement q

P Q2 Why do you say that? Please say more Elaboration prompt

P Q3a Can you give an example from *Power of 1* where participation has been good/bad (same as their response)? Example prompt

P Q3b Can you give an example from *Power of 1* where participation has been bad (opposite from their response)? Example prompt

P Q4 Is Participation democratic?

P Q6 Would you want to go to an exhibition that uses participation again in the future? Direct q

C. Follow-up reflections (vary for each interviewee – based on their previous responses)

End of questions. Do you have any questions you'd like to ask me?

Thanks for your time. [End interview]

Record notes, observations, ideas for follow-up:

APPENDIX G: ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

Introduction

I'm about to go and do my first formal observation at Old Parliament House. I've worked at OPH twice in my life and they've both been pretty formative experiences. Today I'm trying to take a step back, doing some ethnographic observation, to try and appreciate some of the language in the architecture in the built space, but also perhaps to create a textual narrative of what visitors may be seeing in the *Power of 1* exhibition at Old Parliament House.

Getting there

It's 9.30am on Tuesday 21st of July 2015 and I've started on my trip towards the observation activity that I'm going to conduct at Old Parliament House of the *Power of 1* exhibition. I'm on my bike, on my way in to the parliamentary triangle. There's a slight hint of fog in the air and there's no doubt that the crisp blue skies overhead signal a beautiful winter's day in Canberra, a city conceived, planned and built as a political capital, as an expression of a young nation's democratic hopes and dreams.

I can hear the sounds of currawongs and magpies and parrots, alongside the clanging of my old bike wheels. There is a slight smell of smoke from a woodfire and a low din of transportation, of traffic, but not too much. I've stopped cycling and I'm standing on Anzac Parade, which forms a key axis of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin's winning submission to the 1911 Federal Capital Design Competition. The Griffins' design for Canberra gave form to a vision of an ideal democracy (see also Weirick, James, "The Griffins and Modernism", Melbourne, *Transition* Autumn, 1988) as expressed in their submission:

> Australia, of most democratic tendencies and bold radical government, may well be expected to look upon her great future, and with it her federal capital, with characteristic big vision. Australia has in fact, so well learned some of the lessons taught through modern civilisation, as seen in broad perspective from her isolated vantage point, that we may be justified in believing that she will fully express the possibilities for individual freedom, comfort and convenience for public spirit, wealth and splendour of the great democratic city ideal for which her capital offers the best opportunity so far (cited in Headon 2003, 42).

To me, this site signals home. At one end is Mount Ainslie, a place I've not lived far from for the last 20 years. From the base of the mountain, I can see the Australian War Memorial. Then along Anzac Parade there are the many memorials to the many wars. As you follow that axis on to Capital Hill, you see the two parliament houses. Old Parliament House is where the *Power of 1* exhibition is located, the site of the Museum of Australian Democracy. It's my favourite building in Canberra, or at least one of my favourites. There's a grandeur, a formality but also a modest familiarity in this low-slung white building at the bottom of Capital Hill that's been incorporated into the design of the new Parliament House.

Old Parliament House, originally called the Provisional Parliament House, was designed by the chief architect of the Commonwealth of Australia, John Smith Murdoch, to be 'simple, but decorous' in what is defined as an 'inter-war stripped classical style' (MoAD 2015b). I once heard Murdoch described as a control freak by one of the education officers at the Museum of Australian Democracy—he not only designed the building but also items such as wastepaper baskets, ashtrays, chairs and tables. A motif running through the building from the railings to the furniture to the windows is reminiscent of the Union Jack and I love to spot it in the building like a *Where's Wally* book. I could say so much more about the house but I think I'll make my way and move on. It looks quite beautiful glowing on Capital Hill today.

I cycle towards Old Parliament House. I've gone past the new ASIO (spy) building and I'm on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. From where I stand (near the Carillion), I can see the national monuments—the National Museum, the National Library, Questacon, High Court and the National Gallery. Just poking through behind the High Court is the flag pole of new Parliament House and I'm intrigued by the fact that I can't see Old Parliament House from here. It's attempt to be anti-monumental has been quite successful. It's been built into the base of Capital Hill and is not dominating the landscape at this point in time.

I'm about to head over the bridge, Kings Avenue Bridge, and I'll make my way to Old Parliament House. It's magnificent here. I can hear the Carillon tolling, and there are joggers, cyclists and walkers making their way around the lake. Not too many though. Canberra is of course known for being empty and from what I see today I couldn't argue against that.

I'm nearly at Old Parliament House. The first thing I saw to signal that I was nearly there was the row of buses parked out the front. It's winter so there will no doubt be a lot of school groups here—they tend to come to Canberra as part of a ski trip to the snowy mountains nearby. I can see just the side of the large white building. It's one of the extensions to the original building but it's quite well hidden among the plantings and the hedges and the established trees. Very different from how Old Parliament House would have looked when it opened in 1927.

It's 1 degree celsius and not yet 10am. It's cold and fresh. Even with my heavy duty cycling gloves my hands are now freezing cold and numb from having to do my voice memos and my photographs. Still, the white on the sides of the beautiful Old Parliament House building as it contrasts to the crisp blue skies is a sight I'll never tire of.

I've just moved closer to the front of Old Parliament House to get a photograph. For such an iconic building, it's hard to get a good shot—the building is wide and not very tall. I'm looking at Old Parliament House off to the side from the east, the Reps side of the building. I can see from here a very clear view of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy which is such a powerful message of protest and resistance

from Indigenous people. It's a contentious act of protest but a very effective one—it riles a lot of people and creates a presence for Indigenous people near a building where they were largely excluded. Around the tent embassy are the rose gardens. They're cut back now, pruned, because it's winter but they'll be ready for their next bloom. I was spotted at my last stop by a police car who drove past me very slowly and checked me out. These days, symbols of democracies are considered at risk of terrorist threat. So someone standing around taking photographs might be a little bit of a issue for them. I wonder if I'll see them again.

Arrival

I had hoped to walk up the famous front steps where Gough Whitlam stood on the day of the 1975 Dismissal of his government, and said 'Well may we say God save the Queen, because nothing will save the Governor General'. But the front steps are closed for building works. So I've arrived to scaffolding and rather than the grand and heavy doors of the main entrance, I need to approach an alternative entry in the lower entrance. I had hoped to walk through the main entrance to feel like—and see through the eyes of—a visitor rather than a staff member. I haven't been back here since February when I conducted some visitor interviews, and I stopped working here in December last year. As I look around from where I'm standing near the bike rack on the west side of the building, I can see a number of projects that I've had a hand in. But I'm not going to comment on that because I don't want this project to be about my role at Old Parliament House, about me, or the experience of working in this organisation. I want this to be about the built space, trying to understand what visitors are seeing, what meaning they are making. I had hoped to take a photograph of the panorama of the front of this iconic building but I can't because it's covered with scaffolding and printed shade cloth. I notice that even the banner promoting *Power of 1* is covered by scaffolding. I reflect that it's probably for the best that my expectations of what I was going to see aren't being met—it might help me to look more closely and challenge any preconceived notions of what I would find.

As I arrive at the lower level entry door of Old Parliament House, suddenly the signage for the Museum of Australian Democracy appears. The street signs on the way here have all said Old Parliament House but on arrival, the formal name for the institution, the Museum of Australian Democracy, appears. The name is contested—many Australians (including me) still call it Old Parliament House, with some affection, I might add. But the matter of the name can be someone else's study—I don't want it to consume this one.

My entry is a little confusing as I arrive. It makes me feel like I'm going somewhere I'm not authorised to enter. There are very large words printed on shadecloth affixed to the scaffolding which say 'entry' but the doors are locked when you approach. I pressed the buzzer and a tall and bulky security guard with dark hair came over to press another button on the opposite side to release the door so I could enter. After my initial ill-ease, this guard meets me with a warm, wide smile and a bellowing friendly voice that

says ‘welcome’. I thank him and I then move towards the security desk a couple of metres away and speak to an older, shorter security guard (who I recognised but he didn’t seem to recognise me). The guard at the desk asks if he can help me. I explained that I was here to look at visitor responses in the *Power of 1* exhibition, that Andrew Harper had given me permission to visit. The guard screwed up his face and said he’ll have to check with Andrew Harper, that he didn’t know anything about that. I smiled and said that would be fine. Then the guard said that hang on, *Power of 1*, is that where the public can go? Is it upstairs? I say yes, it is. The guard smiles and says he won’t need to give me permission because I was going to go in a public area. I was a little surprised that the guard didn’t seem confident about what the *Power of 1* was or where it was located. I smiled and thanked him and went through, up the stairs, past temporary signs that explained the building works and prevented access up to Kings Hall, to the temporary cloaking desk where I checked in my bag and coat. There are some brochures on the desk but I could not see any promotion of *Power of 1* at the cloak desk.

I originally wanted to do participant observation, after being inspired by an ethnography module on this at the Institute for Qualitative Methods research (IQMR) course I participated in at Syracuse University in June 2015. But I’ve wrestled with how I could do this given that I would be known to many of the staff at MoAD. I decided to risk that I would be open to the staff about why I was visiting and that because MoAD tends to experience low visitation, it would be unlikely that a visitor would overhear our conversations. I had little choice—I expected that the staff would probably know me and I wanted to try to be as unobtrusive as possible to visitors. This approach seems to have worked, at least in part.

I made my way past the newly refurbished cafe, along the long, lower corridor and its green carpet (I am on the Reps side of the building so the furnishings are mostly green). I climb the green linoleum stairs to the main floor and see three staff at the temporary information desk outside the Prime Ministers Suite—Paul, Rossi and Bob the volunteer. We all say hi, exchange greetings, they’re friendly. I’m happy to see them, some familiar and friendly faces. Paul reassures me that the *Power of 1* is 'still running, it’s still working'. I wonder why he needs to reassure me of this. They tell me that the redirection of visitors to this new route during the renovations has had a positive effect—lots of the visitors to Play Up (mostly mothers with young children) now get to see a new part of the building, pointing to the corridor that is in the opposite direction of the *Power of 1*. I don’t get the impression that *Power of 1* is getting a lot of foot traffic or attention anymore. I guess there isn’t a champion for it now I’ve left. I think about how this makes me feel and accept that I’ve moved on to my study and of course it’s reasonable that MoAD has moved on to other priorities too.

I walk down towards the exhibition, past the Government Party Room set-up with its old timber furniture reflecting the Menzies era. There is a school group in the green and timber Reps chamber, taking part in a learning program, reenacting a parliamentary debate. There is a sign at the end of the corridor explaining why King Hall is closed—it is being plastered and painted as part of conservation work. This used to be the way that most visitors accessed *Power of 1*—having walked in from Kings Hall

they veered left and found it. There was also a large banner in Kings Hall on the Reps side as you entered the corridor leading to the exhibition. Although many of the visitors tended to head towards the Reps chamber opposite the gallery space, when I did my visitor interviews I was able to encourage visitors into the exhibition. To see *Power of 1* now, during the building works which have closed off the front entrance and Kings Hall, you need to make an effort to see it, rather than just stumble across it.

Entry and verandah

Power of 1 Entry

I turn from the corridor to the *Power of 1* exhibition and there are two large banners on either side of the entry, asking 'Does your voice count?'. Once in, past the original timber and glass doors with gold painted numbers ('M102'), I see the shoe installation with red strings. This displays shoes of different sizes and eras and was designed to be a visual cue to communicate that this is a different kind of museum exhibition. My memory of the interviews that I conducted earlier in the year is that the shoes seem to capture visitor attention on arrival, or even draw some visitors into the space, or at least they did when visitors would walk from Kings Hall past the exhibition gallery. I'll have to check the transcripts to see if this recollection is accurate.

I move out to the verandah space which links the various rooms in the exhibition gallery. The verandah space is light-filled. Because it once was an outdoor space (before it was enclosed to provide more office space as the parliament grew too big for the provisional building) the verandah has a concrete and tiled floor. The large windows are covered by white semi-opaque screens and texture is varied and light is playful. I admire the Murdoch motifs from the verandah railings outside—they cast shadows on the concrete floors inside and are reflected on the glassy surfaces in the nearby generation rooms. I notice some additions to this space—new signs which draw together the different rooms in this gallery, and a couch with a ipad screen and the SBS survey.

Generation Rooms

The exhibition space is empty so I take the opportunity to observe some of the design vocabularies, gestures, proxemics and decor of the space, in preparation for reading the space using Yanow's 2006 approach. I go through, room by room.

For the exhibition design, we wanted a look and feel that was not your typical museum exhibition. We wanted the rooms to signify that we were trying to do something new and different. Each room includes AV footage from the era, an opportunity to participate, some props and is designed to evoke the era of the generation it represents. A text panel on the wall of each room introduces the generation and lists the main findings from the national baseline survey that relates to that generation.

Boomer Room

I enter the Boomer Room, for people who were born between 1946 and 1964 and they're now in their 50s and 60s. It's a very visual room, given a 1950s feel to contrast with the heritage space. White vinyl covers the ground, and a wire sixties rocket installation embodies the exhibition's footage and props. I picked up a set of old-fashioned head phones where you can listen into the contributions from other visitors in this room. The audio is a conversation of a couple discussing how to use the voice recorder. They are having technical problems. You can hear them ask 'What are we meant to be doing?' and they read out the instructions from the signs nearby: 'Listen to recent responses…' and 'Press button with flashing light…' This conversation of technical frustrations is running as a loop over and over again. I am concerned that this is not a very positive presentation of the audience contributions that are being made. I decide then to make my own recording, to participate in the boomer activity. The provocation asks 'What do you dislike about Australian democracy?' and I said I was sick and tired of politicians putting their snouts in the trough and using public money for their own personal gain. (This is after all the week of the Bronwyn Bishop helicopter scandal.) There is a great, rocking soundtrack to this room, making it feel fun. There are no original or heritage objects on display but there are facsimiles and props: an Albert Namatjira painting, records, Dame Edna wig and glasses, old TVs. The room is trying to feel like it's from its era. There is a provocation—a question that is asked that visitors can contemplate or answer—'What do you dislike about Australian democracy?' There are still visible elements from the original room—the timber door and picture rails. These are not large rooms. My ability to undertake observations is limited by the size of these rooms—about 3 metres by 4 metres—which then dictates how many people can enter without imposing on personal space. I think I'm especially aware of this as I am visiting on my own and when I'm observing visitors it doesn't feel comfortable to enter the generation rooms if they're already in there. (If I had my kids with me I'm sure we would have just gone in.) I try to review the visitor contributions that have come from the audio recordings in this room but the iPod kiosk is not working—it has frozen—so I can't access the contributions.

Builders room

I enter the Builders Room for people who were born in 1925 to 1945 and who are now in their 70s and 80s. This room has been transformed into a 1930s or 1940s style space—wallpaper on the wall, the beautiful narrow original timber flooring is visible, there is an old desk (a prop) and a carpet underneath. Set to a swinging soundtrack (which is pacey, happy and upbeat), there is footage of fashion and newsreels and politics on the walls, some movie posters and some interviews with people from that generation asking about their attitudes to democracy. While I'm in the room I watch a video interview with Rodney Hall. In the Builders Room, you are asked 'what do you like about Australian democracy?' You write your answer on a notepad on the desk, using a pencil, then you take a photo using a secret camera installed in the desk lamp. I can see that some kids have visited the exhibition based on the content and handwriting style of previous contributions in the nearby intray. One says 'pingaz' (which

appears in most of the rooms that day), another ‘I like it when things are fere [fair]’. I see other contributions, one asks ‘what democracy?’ and another says ‘everybody is equal’. There is a funny drawing by someone called Jack. This room has a lot of light flooding in from the verandah outside and there is a question as you leave asking ‘did we get the Builders generation right? Have your say in the Tally room’. There’s another banner on the verandah window that invites you to post at selfie on the MoAD website. This is a new addition. Both of these signs are included in the four generation rooms.

I answer the question in the Builders Room about what do I like about Australian democracy. I write that we enjoy freedom, excellent health and education, a mostly tolerant community and free and fair elections. If I’m unhappy about something I can complain and hopefully get it changed. I then took a photo of my contribution using the secret desk lamp camera (and following the instructions) and then I heard a bell and the voice of Michela Ledwidge, the exhibition multimedia producer, thanking me for ‘joining the conversation’. I go to the iPod kiosk outside the Builder Room and find that my contribution wasn’t on display. This iPod kiosk doesn’t seem to be working either. I’m not sure what the lag is meant to be from uploading my contribution to seeing it on the kiosk but I’ll check again later. I check the Boomers Room iPod kiosk and it is also not uploading—it’s frozen. It reminds me how important maintenance and tech support is if you’re going to have an interactive or participatory experience.

Gen X room

I go to check the Gen X kiosk and it’s also not working, not meeting expectations. I persist for quite a while but the screen is sticky (slow) and unresponsive. On the Gen X kiosk, it’s possible for me to see the range of responses that have been uploaded when the kiosk has worked. There is some gobbledegook surrounding occasionally thoughtful comments. I wonder if I can say that it’s mostly junk? I’ll take some photos and try to analyse this more thoroughly away from the exhibition. I enter the Gen X Room for people born 1965 to 1979, in their 30s and 40s. This is my generation’s room so there is a lot of familiarity in here—from the shoes and the albums and movies, and even some of the sentiments expressed in the interviews. A woman on the screen has just said that on election day she likes to go past the hawkers with the how-to-vote cards and only collect the card from the candidate she’s going to vote for. I do that too! The Gen X Room is bright and colourful, again transforming the heritage space with a look and feel of the generation. There are candy-pink carpet tiles on the floor, a large neon-coloured wall which is used to suspend the props and the AV content and interviews. The provocation in this room is ‘tell us about your experience of democracy’ and there is computer monitor which both screens the AV footage and invites visitors to ‘press any key’. Looking at the iPod kiosk there is a bit of junk from this room and I wonder about the proportion of meaningful responses versus junk. It’s a democracy so I suppose people can respond however they like. I will now think of my own response to the provocation and will type it in using the old Commodore64 keyboard.

For my experience of democracy I tried to write 'I despair about politics and politicians. Where are our leaders and what do they stand for?' And I was going to write ‘please step up’. Unfortunately, the keyboard is so sticky and unreliable that my response looks like a whole lot of gobbledegook. I wonder how many visitors have had the same problem with the technology and getting it to work because it’s hard to write anything articulate on it. It’s a cute idea, I just wonder if it’s obstructing or interfering with the outcome. I decide to check to see if my gen X response has loaded on the iPod kiosk. I can’t see my response on the stand.

Gen Y and beyond

I make my way to the Gen Y and Beyond Room and record a selfie video in response to the provocation ‘what would you change about Australian democracy?’ I say that I want a leader who has a fair and equitable vision for the future of Australia, or something like that. I had six seconds to record my response which was pretty quick but it’s really well communicated so easy to do that one—it has a countdown visual cue so you know when you’re going to start and when you’ve run out of time. I went out to check my response on the iPod stand but there is no longer an iPod stand outside the Gen Y Room so I don’t know if my response has been uploaded or not. This room has also been transformed to have a more contemporary feel. It’s a bold design with many iPods suspended from the ceiling and no props or facsimiles. This room is the best expression of this exhibition not being your typical museum exhibition. This room is for gen Y and beyond, people born between 1980 and 2010, people who are now aged between kids and early 30s. There is shiny red vinyl flooring, the iPods, a text panel on the wall with some shoes, and a spot on the floor explaining how to record your selfie video.

Tally Room

I move to the Tally Room, the large room at the west end of the gallery space. It has a large arch window that frames the view of Mount Ainslie and the axis that started my journey here this morning. I can see the Aboriginal tent embassy from here too. This is a largely white room—the floors, the walls, the ceilings, pretty much everything is white except for the timber details and the colour coding on the column installations and the chalk on the graffiti wall. There are many visitor contributions on the graffiti wall, the secret ballot and the message tree.

Secret ballot

The secret ballot is a voting booth with pencils and thick card where you can privately (in an election booth-style structure) complete the statement ‘I’d fight for my right to…’ then post it through a slot. (A museum staff member then installs the cards on the pegs on the wall to create a very attractive display.) I complete my secret ballot with the statement that I’d fight for my right to protect my children. Responses on the secret ballot display include:

- speak freely without fear of punishment
- end funding to private and religious schools (and another visitor has written in reply to this, on the same card, 'but if no private schools government could not afford to educate everyone at public schools')
- kids—'to make the world better than what it is'. I wonder if this has come from a family visit or a schools visit?
- greater independence and freedom from political interference at the ABC…
- many more—I've photographed them.

I think that the museum staff must be managing this section differently these days. This might be because IGPA at the University of Canberra want to review the visitor contributions that they're getting transcribed for future research. It's not as jam packed and plentiful as it was but it still looks good and a lot of interesting, thoughtful answers.

Message tree

To the left of the secret ballot is a message tree with a very open and unstructured provocation, 'I want to say…' It's an abstract tree structure made of plywood and it's currently overloaded—in a good way—with lots of comments from visitors, including:

- 'This country charges too much money for foreign students to study at university. It's not education it's business. Shame'.
- 'There are too many politicians with snouts in the trough. they tell the public to stop spending whilst people like Bronwyn Bishop are ripping off us taxpayers'. (This is very similar to something I recorded in the Boomer Room.)
- 'What a fantastic country to visit. Thank you Australia'.
- a kid's drawing by someone called Susannah
- and many others.

I take lot of photographs and will analyse them. There appears to be a lot of thoughtful comment about gay marriage, politicians, education, the environment—important issues. I'm interested in how often the comments relate to issues in the news. It gives me heart that Australians are engaged.

Graffiti wall

The graffiti wall is a large white chalk board that invites visitors to complete the sentence 'My voice counts because…' Today, it seems to have become a bit more managed or controlled compared with the last time I was here (about five months ago). It's neater and cleaner and doesn't have the mess and correspondence/conversation between different visitors that it used to. I wonder if there has been a

change in the maintenance practice or if this is an impact of the new education programs run from *Power of 1*.

SBS survey

The large box in the corner that used to display the SBS survey and the digital visitor contributions has been removed. The absence of this large structure lets in a lot of beautiful natural light from the arched window now, so maybe that's why. Or maybe the museum continued to have technical problems so it had to go. There is now an iPod screen at the end of the verandah with the SBS survey now. I notice with a smile, while admiring the sun streaming into the space, that a derivation of the JS Murdoch Union Jack motif is across the arched window. The light in the Tally Room is gorgeous, supported by some very effective exhibition lighting.

Column installations

In the centre of the Tally Room are the four clusters of column installations which express the results of the national baseline survey of Australian's attitudes to democracy. They showcase the headline findings of the research—likes, dislikes, how we participate and the changes we want. These shape the provocations in each of the generation rooms. The vision of the tangible data visualisation designers was for visitors to 'locate themselves in a field of data'.

I've noticed a number of visitors have come in and spent quite a lot of time interpreting the data on the columns, as well as reading the graffiti wall, the secret ballot display and the message tree. I haven't seen anyone participate today. I've seen them press buttons on technology (usually without success) but I haven't seen them contribute anything. Which is interesting and concerning. I wonder why that is. When I was here at the beginning of the year, people were contributing. What has changed?

Ping-pong ballot

The Tally Room is a little scuffed after this time but holding up pretty well given it's nearly 10 months old and interactive. I'm not sure if it gets a lot of visitors or not. Today there have been only a few visitors while I've been observing. The provocation in the ping-pong ball interactive asks 'representatives should be part-time and work in the real world?'. More people have answered yes than no.

Visitor observations

Young couple (10:25am to 10.31am)—photo 100-0788

Some visitors arrive. They're a young couple in their mid-to-late 20s, perhaps from a Chinese or similar background. They look neat and healthy. Both are wearing brightly coloured puffer jackets in purple and blue, with denim jeans or black tracksuit pants and sports shoes. He is also wearing a large slouchy black

backpack. They are moving determinedly through the space, into each room, and she is taking many photos of the exhibit or of him—the shoes, the graffiti wall, each room installation.

This is my first visitor observation. I decide to stand at the iPod kiosk near the entry passage outside the Boomer Room to try to find an unobtrusive place to observe. The boomer kiosk has frozen and doesn't seem to work. This may have led the couple to use the kiosk on the other side, outside the Gen X Room, briefly, just pressing a couple of buttons (it also doesn't seem to work, or at least doesn't engage them), past the Gen X Room to the Gen Y Room. Once in the Gen Y Room, she takes photos. Then, into the Tally Room for more photos and they read a few of the contributions from visitors, speaking briefly, in Mandarin, I think. Then they walk past the other generation rooms into the Builders Room. She takes a photo of him standing behind the chair at the desk. (I reflect that this might be the only, or one of the few, places in the building where you can stand that close to a desk. Perhaps that's the appeal after so many roped off areas?). I didn't see them participate in any of the interactives. They pressed some buttons—quickly, briefly—on the iPod touch screens and they chatted briefly in the generation rooms and Tally Room (although their conversation was in another language so I couldn't listen in). They stayed briefly in the exhibition space, around 5 minutes.

Young man (10:41am to 10.54am)—photo 100-0794 PLUS iphone photo 10:44

A young man in his early 30s enters the gallery. I hear his footsteps before I see him. He is wearing jeans, a black top, brown desert boots, has short ruffled brown hair and didn't shave today. He turns left and stands at the door of the Gen X Room, looking at the display. He then walks past the Gen Y Room, looks briefly as he passes it, to the Tally Room. He spends some time in the Tally Room, mostly reading the data and text on the column installation. He reads the graffiti wall and chuckles at one response. He doesn't seem to spend time at secret ballot or the message tree, although I'm standing in these areas. After about five minutes he leaves the Tally Room and goes back to the Gen X Room. I think he must be a member of gen X. He reads the introductory text panel on the wall and watches the AV material which mostly is screened through the monitor above the Commodore64 keyboard. I try to start a conversations. I watch the AV material with him, it's about the woman who only collects how-to-vote cards from the party she's going to vote for. Text is displayed over the video that states "press any key". I ask him what do they want us to do? He says, they're showing the history of democracy, how it's all changing. (Which, I think, is exactly what the exhibition is trying to say… but it wasn't what I was asking him so I rephrase.) But I think they're asking us to press a button, I say to him. We both look at the screen. I press the button. A message is displayed, "Type your response then press return". He says, there you go. I move to the keyboard. He says, I'm going to the other room now. I thank him. I wait a little while before following him so I don't look like a stalker. The rooms are small and aren't well suited for observation. I find him later in the Builder Room, viewing the footage from the era. He then moves to the Gen Y and Beyond Room. He is spending a lot of time reading and viewing the exhibition, showing

signs of engagement. He has by now made his way into all of the rooms in the exhibition, spending more than 10 minutes in here. But he hasn't written anything down or pressed a button.

Visitor observation: people who don't stay

10:45am (approx)—a woman aged around 60 walks in past the shoe display to the verandah, looks around and leaves straight away.

11am—Two men in their 50s walk in to the verandah, press a button on the ipod kiosk outside the Gen X Room (which doesn't work) then turn around a leave.

Visitor observation: Male friends (11:41-11:46am) photo 100-0832

Two 30 something males in pale jeans and sneakers walk into the exhibition. They go into every room and press buttons, especially on the keyboard in the Gen X Room, but also the iPod kiosks. They walk into the Tally Room, walking very quickly with purpose, stand in the secret ballot box but don't write anything, briefly looked (as they walked) at the graffiti wall and the secret ballot displays, and the ping-pong ball ballot. Did not write anything or type anything in the exhibition.

Visitor observation: Family with child—(11:45am-11:53am)—no photo

A couple with a young child around 11 years old. All were wearing their puffer jackets to protect them against the cold and they had Asian appearances. The mother and son arrived first in the exhibition, then the mother and father moved to the Tally Room and spent quite a lot of time reading the graffiti wall, the column results, the secret ballot and the message tree. They commented about the mis-spelling of democracy in the statement in chalk 'hongkongers need decromacy'. I wondered if they were from Hong Kong. About 8 minutes all up. Then the mother went and got the son who was looking at the some media in another room. The father and son then spent time together in the Tally Room, at one point the father explained what the question about part-time representatives meant in the ping pong ballot. They chatted for a while and looked at a few things before deciding to go. I did not see them participate in any activity.

Reflections

It feels a bit like *Power of 1* is lacking a champion to make sure people know about the exhibition, that the exhibition is running well and thoughtfully maintained. From the guard lacking confidence about where the exhibition was, to all the iPod kiosks not working (which would be a fairly negative first impression for visitors who are still deciding whether to enter, stay or go).

I don't see anyone participate in the time I've visited. Two of the five groups I observed were showing signs of engagement—spending time reading the interpretive materials, the results, chatting about the

content, some laughter at other visitors' responses—but no-one participated. Two groups walked straight in and straight out again (one of these groups did try to use the iPod kiosk before leaving),

I'd like to find out from the museum how they're promoting *Power of 1*. The banner out the front is covered in scaffolding, there is no mention of it at the information desks. I saw no staff in the space in the time I was there. Very few people came into the space during my observation.

It's good to be back at the exhibition, all the same. I am yet again inspired by the many thoughtful responses from visitors. There are still some ridiculous ones. The question is, what were our expectations? Does it matter how many people participate? I'm not sure the technology is being maintained adequately and there are visitor comments mocking the Commodore 64 keyboard (something like 'what were you thinking?'). While a cute idea, the Commodore64 keyboard doesn't seem to be effective.

On the way out, Rossi (a front of house staff member) tells me that Canberrans have seen *Power of 1* already, that it's old news to them. She says the Kings Hall works are taking their toll, the new visitor route means that *Power of 1* is out of the way. I need to find out if numbers have changed. Before the plastering works, people would walk up the main stairs and instantly find the *Power of 1*. The tech has deteriorated which is a shame. The exhibitions are holding up well. The quality of written comments is still high, more so than the digital comments. The graffiti wall seems a bit too neat and dominated by children, which has changed the narrative. The iPod stands could almost be removed, they're a distraction. I'm interested in why the SBS survey box was removed. I'm not sure if it would be valuable to do more visitor interviews because there are so few visitors to MoAD at the moment. I look forward to reflecting a bit more on this observation.

I leave Old Parliament House at 12:45pm.